argosy

A LIFE TO LOSE TENSE NEW THRILLER

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argosy

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No Mate of Mine	**D'Arcy Niland**	**2**
	Illustration by Bill Linden	
And if This Ain't Love, Gorblimey	**Gerald Kersh**	**16**
Steam Schooner Skipper	**Jacland Marmur**	**21**
The Third Wife	**Darrell Bates**	**33**
Help! in the House		**40**
Pa and the Sad Turkeys	**Harry Mark Petrakis**	**43**
Under the Clock	**Christian Miller**	**53**
Take Me, for Instance	**Hugh B. Cave**	**57**
No Smoking on the Apron	**William Sansom**	**65**
Peynet Cartoons		**78**
Love, Justice and a Bomb	**B. Traven**	**82**
	Illustration by Jon Davis	
A Successful Author	**Christine Arnothy**	**94**
Soccer Quiz	*Compiled by Jack Kosky*	**103**
The Treasure of Oak Island	**Edmund Burke**	**104**
	Map by Donald Blake	
A Life to Lose *(First Part)*	**Lawrence Hammond**	**118**
	Cover by Robb	
Book Reviews		**160**
Ten Minute Crossword		**167**
Argosy Crossword		**168**

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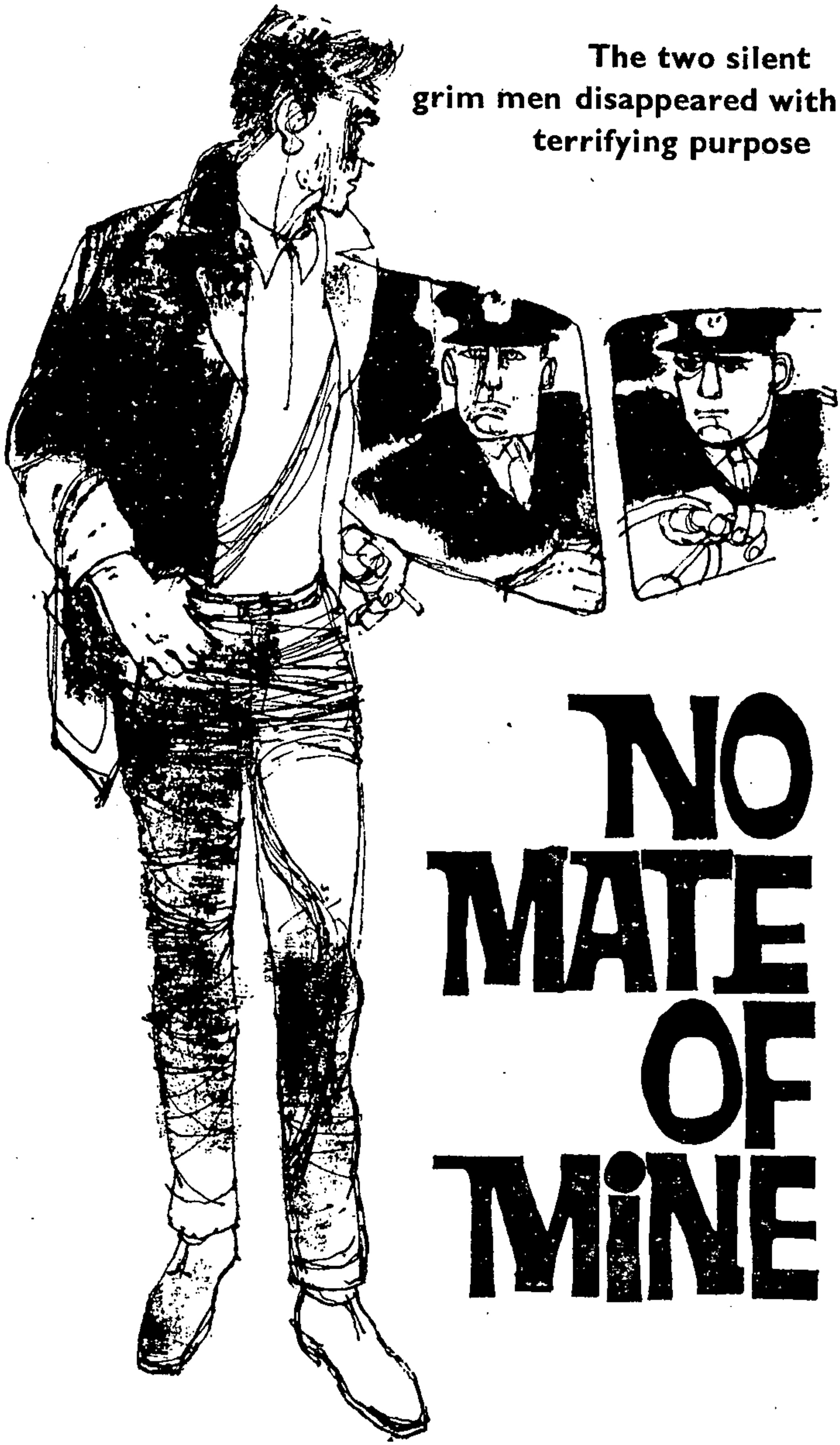

The two silent grim men disappeared with terrifying purpose

NO MATE OF MINE

BY D'ARCY NILAND

THEY hit this town in the south—a town that clutched the hem of a mountain, a damp town that smelled of wet shavings and dripping trees after rain. Wintry lights, blurred by mist into heads of thistledown, marked it like a back-country airstrip in the darkness of night and forest.

They got off the truck and waved it goodbye.

The main street started in the black deeps, became sepia where it passed the shops banked on each side, and disappeared into the blackness again. It was deserted.

"Hell, what a dump," Frankie said, with real hate. He was the younger one, the tall one. The scar coursed through the beard on his cheek like a strip of plaster. "Stinking bush towns, I could blow 'em off the face of the earth. We should have gone on."

"Quit moaning, willya," Macauley snapped. "You know why we're here."

He was thickset, tough-looking, with burning eyes.

The warm air struck them as they went into the hotel. It was as cosy as the bright furnishings, comfortable as the clock ticking, and welcome as the sight of the girl on a chair crocheting behind the office desk: big eyes, a ponytail and breasts. Macauley did the talking. Frankie did the looking, overstating his case. She did the blushing.

They registered and went up to the room. It was an icebox with two beds, a blind and a chest of drawers lined with last year's meat wrappers. It had the smell and look of a travellers' shakedown in use since the horse and buggy days.

Frankie dropped his swag. "Decent sort."

"Leave her that way," Macauley said.

He sat down on one of the beds, rolled a cigarette. Frankie looked about him, gritting his teeth with the tension of his hate for the room and the town and everything in his life. He sighed desperately.

"Well, what's the next move?" he said. "What do we do now?"

"We think," Macauley told him.

"I could do with a feed."

"Give your guts a rest."

"Rest? What the hell are you talking about? We haven't eaten since this morning. What's up with you?" He drummed with his fingers on the wall, urged by his feelings to say more.

glaring at Macauley. Then he found the words that didn't sound too harsh. "You might be the greatest faster of all time, the iron man, but me, I'm just ordinary flesh and blood, and right now they're telling me all about it."

Macauley looked at him. Slowly, his rocky face softened. "Listen, Frankie, I could eat a horse, too, but time don't stand still, mate, and thinking a thing out too late is like not thinking it out at all."

"Well, you're the Brains Trust," Frankie said, smiling to cool the heat in his voice. "You think it out. I'll go and get us some tucker and get that sheila to bring it up here."

Macauley thought about it. Then he said, "Righto. But keep your hands in your pockets."

Outside the door Frankie hand-brushed his hair and ran a couple of wet fingers over his eyebrows. He found the girl in the office, still crocheting. She pretended not to hear or see him until he spoke. Then she said, "Oh," and came over to the counter slowly, smiling her inquiry.

Frankie made her blush again the way he looked at her. Then he changed the subject, and asked her how about something to eat. She told him tea was off, but there was a fish and chip shop down at the bottom end of the town.

"Steak and eggs is what I'm thinking of," Frankie said. "Don't matter about dessert. You'll do for peaches and cream."

"That'll be enough of that now," she said. But he knew she liked it. She told him the cook was gone, and her mother and father were away. Frankie said he could handle a pan, but she shook her head. "I'm afraid the best I can do is get you something from the fridge," she said. "Cold meat and tomato, would that be all right?"

Hell, he thought, something to go with the chill and the gloom: typical hayseed pub in a wayback burg. But he smiled and said that would be okay. She told him she wouldn't be long. He said he'd give her a hand.

The kitchen was clean and cold as a frozen spoon. She put on a kettle over the primus, because the stove was out. He put clods of butter on bread. She sliced meat.

"What about your mate?" she said. "He won't mind this, I s'pose."

"Who, cranky Mac?" He grinned. "Well, it can only make him bad-tempered enough to come down and take a bite out of you."

She laughed.

He eyed her figure. "Be nice enough at that."

"What?"

"Taking a bite out of you."

She said quickly, "There's some lettuce there."

"Yeah," Frankie said. "I can see it, curled up with the cold, just out of the morgue. How do you live in a place like this, a girl like you?"

"What's the matter with it?"

"Well, what's there to do?"

She looked at him. "Plenty. You can fish and shoot and go for walks on the mountain and into the forest. We have pictures twice a week and dances every Saturday. It's quiet and healthy. What more do you want?"

"Give me the bright lights," he said. "I can't wait to get back to them."

"What are you doing here then?"

"Business," he said. "Mac's business. Now take him. He's different from me. Pals with a hard frost, him. Sleep in the rain. Chew a straw and rinse his mouth and that's breakfast. I can rough it, too, but why the hell should I? Life's too short to put up with such things. That's a mug's game."

"Where's he from then?"

"City, too, only you wouldn't know it. He can't stand the place, he reckons. Hates it. Goes back every now and again just to see his wife and kid. The wilds have got him."

"But you seem to get along all right," she said. "Like mustard?"

"Anything hot I go for," he said, and she blushed again. "Yeah, he's all right, I s'pose, for a bush rat. We haven't been together that long, though."

"How long?"

"Three weeks. Struck him on the last job, and we thought we'd work our way north together. But I've just about had it. It's Sydney for me next stop, good old Sydney and some easy living."

"When are you leaving?"

"We'll blow tomorrow, I s'pose."

The meal was ready and he took the plates from her, standing close and feasting his eyes on her. "Give us a kiss," he said. "Just to warm me up."

She skipped away from him with a little hoot of pleasure and said, "Get off with you. I'll bring the tea up in a few minutes."

"You know what this is a good night for," he said.

"What?"

"Going to bed with a good book."

He moved out of the kitchen on his way; then he stopped and looked back. "Or a bad woman."

She stood wordless, and he took away the memory of her faint, excited smile. I'll see you later, he thought.

Macauley had his shirt off as if it was the middle of summer; he was just finishing a shave. His breath was fogging the glass, and he had to keep wiping it. Frankie, cold to the marrow, looked at him with contempt that reflected envy. He put the food down and told Macauley to get stuck into it before it froze to the plates. He didn't want to be there. He knew what was coming. More talk, the big one. He wanted to be back with the girl. He sat eating wolfishly.

Macauley towelled his face. "I've worked it out," he said. "We see Rayburn tonight instead of tomorrow. We get that over and we pull out of here. On the paper train. She leaves Gidgie at ten. I reckon a quarter to eleven will see her here."

"But why tonight?" Frankie said, not interested; disappointed.

Macauley put on his shirt, sat down on the bed and ate. "I'll tell you why. We've got trouble behind us."

"Yeah," Frankie said. "And that's the right bloody place for it to be."

"Don't try to be smart," Macauley said. "Listen, I know Blackie Hume better than you do. He's touched. A violent, vindictive revenge-artist. He'd crawl up a barbed-wire hill with his legs off to get his own back. And his two brothers are no different. We bought trouble when you clocked him."

Frankie shrugged, bored. "So you said. So that's why we scrammed out of Gidgie. So that's why we got out on the road and bummed a lift and got off at this hole. So all right. But it's back there now. It's forty miles away."

"Don't kid yourself. You clobbered him up pretty good, and he—"

"I told you why."

"Why doesn't matter."

"We were just sitting there in the pub having a drink, and you went out the back, and he made a crack about you and me stringing along together, and I got stuck into him. I made quick work of him—I don't think he's so tough. It was all over when you got back."

"He was drunk; full as a boot. And he wouldn't have meant what you thought. You're too hot with that head of yours. But never mind that now." Macauley wagged his finger and said grimly, "This is Blackie Hume. Soon as he collected himself he'd get hold of his brothers. They'd scour that town looking for us. They'd get into Blackie's truck and fly hell-bent for here as soon as he remembered this was where we were heading. And he'd know that because we told him I intended to see Rayburn about that money he owes me. Well, listen, boy, if they find us in this town it'll be no picnic, I tell you. It'll be no mazurka with that crowd."

"I wouldn't have run away from the bastards," Frankie said vehemently.

Macauley shot him a hard, piercing look. "That's because you don't think," he said with some heat, resenting the implication. "No, you would have stayed there and copped the lot—for sweet damn-all. And don't run away with the idea that I can't stand and deliver when I have to. Listen, I've known Blackie Hume for years, and I've never had a fight with him yet. If I ever do, it'll have to be for a good reason, not just over nothing." He lit a cigarette. "We did the right thing."

Frankie looked exasperated. "Ah, you're making a big issue out of nothing. Anyway, it's got nothing to do with you. You're not in it."

"What do you mean?" Macauley looked puzzled.

"This we and us business, you keep saying it all the time. It's me. I'm the one. Not we and us. You had nothing to do with it."

Macauley stood up, astonished. "Well, I'll be damned," he said.

"If there's trouble," Frankie said, "I'll take care of it."

"Listen," Macauley told him. "Trouble for you is trouble for us. Trouble for me is trouble for us. We're mates. We stick together." He glared. "That's my form, anyway. What's yours?"

"Okay, okay," Frankie said, with a surly impatience.

"If you want to pull out, all right," Macauley said. "Just say so. We'll split up here and now. You go your way and I'll go mine."

"I said okay, didn't I?" Frankie said. "What are you getting snotty on a man for? I'm with you."

There was silence, each with his thoughts, each feeling he was on the verge of a blow-up. Then Macauley sat down.

He sighed and said quietly, "If we have to fight the Hume brothers we'll fight, but the sensible thing is to avoid them if we can. So we see Rayburn, tonight like I said, pick up my money and blow. Let's hope the Humes don't get here before that."

There was a knock on the door and the girl brought in tea on a tray with biscuits. Frankie came alive, smiling, interested. He asked her to sit down for a minute. She declined. Macauley asked her if she knew where Andy Rayburn lived. She told him at the northern end of the main street, in the house with the only white picket fence in the town. Frankie saw her out.

They went down through the chilly gloom to Rayburn's. The fog was not one of those rolling ones. It was a thickening haze that blurred the lights and gave trees and buildings the shadowy shapes of images in a mirage.

Rayburn answered the door, and as the light struck his visitors he looked stupefied with surprise.

"Macauley," he said.

"That's right," Macauley said. "And I'm not here to waste time. I want that money you owe me."

Rayburn didn't seem to know whether to look guilty or mystified. He began to lift his hands, move his lips.

Frankie grabbed him by the shirt. "Give it to him, you chiseller." He screwed the cloth. Rayburn looked afraid.

"Cut the rough stuff, Frankie," Macauley said. "And keep out of it."

Rayburn, gasping a little, beckoned them in. He was an elderly man, frail, in a heavy tweed coat and baggy trousers and slippers, with a muffler round his neck. His gaunt face was drained of colour. He looked unwell. Macauley was shocked by the change in him, but the shock only slightly softened the edge of his tones.

"It's taken me eighteen months to get on to you, Rayburn," Macauley said. "But I wouldn't have cared if it'd been eighteen years. Nobody goes into smoke owing me fifty quid."

Rayburn shook his head. "No, I'm sorry about that, Macauley. But I had trouble—big trouble. Family. Business. I needed every penny."

"So did I," Macauley said.

"That was the last contract job I did," Rayburn said. "Nobody knows what trouble I had."

"Ah, hell," Frankie said. "Bring on the violins."

"You should have told me, instead of skipping," Macauley said. "I might have listened." His voice tightened. "I want that money and I want it now."

"You would have had it long ago," Rayburn said. "Only I didn't know where to send it."

"Ah, fork it over," Frankie snarled.

Macauley shot him a reproachful glance, reminding him that this was his business and that he was capable of handling it. Rayburn, too, looked at Frankie in timid anger, then shrugged as if to indicate the futility of trying to be sincere with an unreasonable man threatening violence.

"I'll get my cheque book," he said.

"No cheques," Macauley said. "Cash."

Slowly Rayburn took out his wallet. He pulled out some notes, counted them. "I've only got a tenner," he said. "Until tomorrow."

"No tomorrow about it," Macauley said.

"Look for yourself then," Rayburn snapped, fighting his self-control. "That's all I've got." He handed over the notes.

"Why don't we bounce the lot out of the bastard?" Frankie said, moving forward.

"No wait!" Rayburn was panting a little. "I think I know where I can get the rest. My sister. She lives just down the road. Six doors down. It'll only take a minute."

Macauley thought quickly. Go down there and it might be some trap, with a dozen yahoos waiting at a card party maybe, anything. He said, "I'll go and get your sister and bring her here. You wait. Frankie, keep an eye on him."

Rayburn's sister's place must have been a good hundred yards along. It was a square house with a veranda all around, and a big elm tree like a black cloud on a stick. The house was in darkness. Macauley thought the old girl could be in bed, although it was early. He knocked on the front door, then walked right around and knocked on the back. He listened for sounds inside, the shuffle of feet. He watched for the glow of a lamp. There was nothing. If she was in there she was dead or drunk. More likely she was out.

He went back through the mist. Rayburn's front door was open. The dining room was empty. Frankie was gone. A chair was overturned, the mat rucked. He saw blood spatters on the wall. Rayburn was on the floor, half in the doorway of the room and the kitchen adjoining. Macauley bent and turned him over. He was a mess. He looked a goner.

Impulsively, Macauley hurried to leave. He stopped suddenly at the door. Then he turned back. A pretty pickle, he thought; but there was only one thing to do. There was no phone that he could see, so he lifted Rayburn and carried him on his shoulder, fireman-fashion, down the main street. He put his head in the door of the fish and chip shop and asked where was the hospital. The astounded Yugoslav told him the next side street to the left.

Macauley walked there as fast as he could. It was only a small cottage hospital. A nurse came. Another. Then a doctor. Macauley lowered Rayburn on to a bed.

"What happened?" the doctor asked, examining Rayburn.

"I found him like that," Macauley said.

The doctor looked at Macauley slowly and searchingly. Macauley read what he thought. He understood, but he didn't like it. They wanted his name and address. He told them to never mind that; he'd be going, he said.

He was only five minutes gone, on the way to his hotel, when an old black car chuttered to a stop beside him. A jowled police sergeant talked to him for a second, told him to get in. The young constable spun the wheel. They took Macauley into the station.

"Doctor Merton rang me," the sergeant said. "Rayburn's in a coma. Did you bash him?"

"Would I take him to the hospital if I bashed him?"

"You might."

"I found him like that. That's all I'm saying because it's all I know."

"How'd you come to find him like that?"

"I went to see him."

"What about?"

"A few quid he owed me."

The sergeant walked across to the window, put his hands behind his back and looked at the hoar frost on the glass. He spoke without turning, "Two of you came here to Julia Town this evening and booked in at the Welkin Hotel." Macauley wasn't surprised that the policeman knew. You mightn't see anybody when you came into a town like this, but they saw you, the stranger, and the word soon got around. "Where's your mate?"

"How would I know?"

"Was he with you?"

"No, he wasn't," Macauley said truthfully, but with protective intention.

"What's his name?"

"Frankie Lowry."

"Go and bring him here, Bill, will you?"

The constable went out. The sergeant phoned the hospital. His face was grim as he hung up.

"How is he?" Macauley said. "I mean it, Sarge, how is he?"

"Fifty-fifty. Still in a coma."

They heard the car outside. The sergeant told Macauley to shut up now. Macauley said he wasn't going to say a word.

Frankie walked in ahead of the constable. He was quiet but seemed on edge. To Macauley he had the aspect of a man in a jam and looking for a way out.

"What do you know about Andy Rayburn?" the sergeant said.

"Why, nothing," Frankie said, with innocent sincerity. "Only what the constable here told me. That he didn't look like pulling through."

"This your mate?" the sergeant asked.

Frankie's face darkened angrily. "He's no mate of mine," he said.

"You know him, though?"

"Of course I know him, but he's no mate of mine, like I said. Anybody that'd do that to an old man, he's nobody's mate."

"How do you know he did it?"

"He was going to see Rayburn. That was the whole idea of coming here to this town. We left the hotel together to go and see him, but I left Macauley and went back."

"Why?" the sergeant asked.

Frankie didn't answer immediately. Then he said, "When he told me what he was going to do, I wanted no part of it. And if you don't believe I was at the pub ask Rosie. She'll tell you."

The constable nodded. "That's right, Sarge. Rosie said he went out and came back alone and he's been with her all the time since."

The sergeant went back to Frankie. "You said... when Macauley told you what he was going to do. What did he tell you?"

"Well," Frankie said carefully, then getting a run-on with the words. "He said he was going to rob the old bloke and put him on the knuckle. Listen, we had no dough at all when

we hit this town. Search him now and I'll bet you find some."

The sergeant told Macauley to empty his pockets. Macauley did so and the sergeant picked up the thin roll of notes. He looked at Macauley. "It doesn't look too good for you, mister, does it?"

Macauley said nothing, for there was nothing to say. He was skewered; on the spit.

"Lock him up."

The constable moved across to Macauley. Macauley's eyes, burning yet calm, were fixed on Frankie.

Frankie looked away uncomfortably. "Okay for me to go now, Sarge?"

The sergeant nodded. "We know where you are if we want you."

Frankie turned to go. Macauley halted him with a word. Slowly he walked across the room and looked into Frankie's face. He said quietly, "You told me you knew how to handle trouble. Now you've shown me. Well—it's one way."

Macauley sat like a Buddha in the darkness of the lock-up. He could hear a rat gnawing under the floorboards in the corner. The silence, the cold, didn't worry him, but the abnegation of a mate did. It gave him a low, spiritless feeling. Yet there was nothing new in that: there was always the mate who'd lie for you and the mate who'd lie about you. A bull-head, Frankie: make strife, then do anything to get himself out of it, even to putting a mate in. He was only a patch-and-mend trouble-shooter. He met one crisis at a time. He had got himself out of this one—but for how long? He would clear out. He had to. For if Rayburn recovered—and no doubt Frankie was banking on the hope that he wouldn't—he would identify him as his attacker. But of course there was the chance that Rayburn might incriminate them both out of vindictiveness, and accuse them of robbing him. That wasn't going to help Macauley much.

But it didn't quite happen that way.

An hour later the constable opened the door and took Macauley back into the station. The sergeant pointed to all his belongings, including the money on the desk, and said, "Okay, you can go."

Macauley stared in suspicious disbelief. "What happened?"

The sergeant said he'd just had word from the hospital. Rayburn was conscious but still seriously ill. He had told the doctor what happened.

"Doc says you got him there in the nick of time. How do you like that?"

"Just shows it don't hurt to do a man a good turn," Macauley said, gathering up his things. "Did Rayburn know I took him there?"

"The doc said he told him. And Rayburn cleared you."

"Well, that was decent of him. I'll scrub round that other forty quid he owes me."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"It's your cobber we're going to pick up now," the sergeant said. He jabbed Macauley with a hard finger. "And don't start telling me he didn't do it. Where'd you get in tow with a thing like that?"

"You've got to find a man out," Macauley said.

"Even to letting him cut your throat first? You want your head read, fronting for a no-hoper like him. He'd have hung you. You're a mug."

"I'm no mug, sergeant," Macauley said. "Not in my book. And one day, when you know enough about the book I go by, you'll understand that."

They heard the clatter of feet. Suddenly. Then the man burst in. The words came breathlessly.

"God Almighty!" the sergeant said. "Where is she now?"

"They've just taken her to the hospital. And he's gone. We ransacked the pub. It'll kill her people when they hear. We're getting a mob together." The man bolted out with the sergeant calling after him.

He and the constable pulled on their greatcoats, took torches and revolvers.

"Two in a few hours. Assault and battery and rape. Some night's work!" The sergeant turned his savage gaze on Macauley. "He's a beauty, this one."

"I didn't rear him," Macauley said. "Don't look at me."

The police hurried out. Macauley went back to the hotel. Lights were on everywhere in the main street. Men were moving about, knotting in groups. He looked at his watch. It was nearly ten o'clock. Plenty of time to make that train.

He heard a clanging, spluttering car, and went to the window. He saw a utility truck halt at the kerb down the street. The driver got out. Only one other living creature looked like Blackie Hume—a gorilla. And this was no gorilla. His two brothers got out and the truck lifted four inches on its springs.

Macauley went out down the back way. The police and some men there saw him but were not interested. He walked fast till he saw the little railway station in the gloom, four blurry dots of light and a shed-like building. He eased down. A little while and the searchers would be everywhere, and the mob mind at work. They mightn't be too fussy about roughing him up on the strength of his association with the fugitive.

He walked down along the line. As he passed a clump of blackberry bushes he heard his name and stopped. The figure walked out of the fog and stood before him. "Go on, Mac, take a swipe. I deserve it. Knock me down. Go on."

"I don't have to," Macauley said. "It's coming."

"Listen, Mac. Rayburn—he tried to get away. I tried to stop him. He came at me with a poker. I had to let him have it."

"That's your story, you knuckle-happy moron."

"You've got to believe me. I thought I'd done him in and I ran. I don't know why. I just panicked."

"That's you all right," Macauley said.

"For God's sake, Mac, listen to me—"

"You're real popular," Macauley said. "The cops are after you, a bunch of blokes in the town are after you, and do you know who just arrived? The Hume boys. With their little axe to grind. You've got a packet of trouble, boy, and I'm going to be interested to hear how you handle this lot."

Frankie said nothing. He just stood there. Then he put out his hand. "I'll make it up to you, Mac. You've got money. I'm broke. Give us a break."

The train sounded like the sough of far-off pines.

"Just a few quid to help me get out of here. I don't mean on the train, that'd be crazy. I mean—"

Macauley started to walk along the gravel towards the platform. Frankie walked after him, persisting with his appeal. They could see dots of yellow in the gloom through the forest.

"Torches," Macauley said. "The human bloodhounds." He looked pitilessly at Frankie. "Heading this way."

The train sound was nearer now, and beyond the trees they could see the glimmering bubble of the engine's floodlight.

Frankie caught Macauley by the shoulder. "Give us that money or I'll take it off you."

Macauley shook himself free and stepped back, his eyes glittering. "By God," he said, "don't pick on me. Don't make that mistake. I'm no drunken Blackie Hume, no spent old man, no kapok sheila. These hands have beaten a lot of

men. Champions. They won't have any trouble with you."

Frankie looked at him, his face ridden with rage and fear and desperation. "I never thought you could do this to me, Mac. I thought we were pals."

"You put that straight," Macauley said. "Back there in the cop-shop."

"What?"

"'He's no mate of mine,' you said."

He looked at Frankie staring at him, staring and still hoping for a last-minute reprieve, though the shouts of wrath and despair and abuse were all ready to tear from his throat.

"You were right, boy," Macauley said. "Dead right."

He turned his back on the doomed figure, and hurried towards the platform, where the train was rolling down like a great serpent. It ground to a halt breathing fire and steam. The guard heaved off the papers. Macauley climbed up into the guard's empty van. Two silent, grim men with torches looked in there, went all up and down the outside of the train. They were careful, thorough, vengeful. They disappeared with terrifying purpose.

The train started to move. Macauley looked back into the foggy blackness hiding a frightened and desperate man. He slumped back in his seat. There was no gratification in him. He looked bleakly at his trembling fists.

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16

GERALD KERSH

And If This Ain't Love, Gorblimey

IT took me a long time to catch Mrs. Corcoran red-handed. She was a colossal woman who suffered with something she called Gas: when she arrived at eight o'clock she was merely fat, but in the course of the morning she swelled and at eleven o'clock when she left she was generally bloated, sometimes almost dropsical. She had gas in her sleeves, gas in her pockets and gas in her shopping bag.

Like other writers of mysteries, I can spin you an intricate web of plot, counterplot, an infinitely tricky crime and detection; but if, say, I left you alone with the kitchen stove, saw you staggering out under the weight of a heavy bundle and later found the kitchen stove gone, I should have to call a policeman to solve the riddle.

Beginning with small objects like fountain pens and packets of cigarettes, Mrs. Corcoran worked her way up to things like vases (which she said she had broken and thrown away) and, little by little, a complete breakfast set. Once as she was leaving my bedroom, I observed half a yard of silk scarf hanging from under her sweater. Mrs. Corcoran said it must have got caught on a pin when she was tidying my wardrobe.

I had invited her to help herself to a hot drink and a snack if she got hungry or thirsty—tea and coffee disappeared by the pound; chickens and loaves of bread went whole. I reasoned, The poor woman is a compulsive eater. Perhaps she has diabetes, or tapeworms—and went back to writing *Murder Multiplex*, in which the detective, by a marvellous complex of deductions and the application of abstruse psychological methods picks the culprit out of seventy-five suspects all with motive, weapon and opportunity.

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She said she'd confess everything — if I didn't call the police

My shirts, some of which she took home to wash, became fewer. A pair of hand-made shoes ceased to be. She grew bolder until, coming home unexpectedly, I surprised her in the act of winding one of my winter overcoats about her waist under her skirt.

I said, "Mrs. Corcoran, I have always treated you pretty well. I hate ingratitude. I am now going to call the police."

I intended to do no such thing; but this great hard-mouthed woman who could raise a piano on her back burst into tears, fell on her knees, clasped her huge hands in supplication and said: "For God's sake, sir, don't! Don't! It would break Arthur's 'eart. I only borrowed one or two of your things. I never stole them. I can prove it." She opened her purse and took out a little bundle of pawn tickets. "See, sir? The very minute my Arthur got on his feet I was going to get everything back for you. I swear on the Bible. I'll do anything, but don't call the police. It would break my Arthur's 'eart. I'd do anything..."

The scene reminded me of something out of a melodrama: a proud beauty offers herself to a moneylender; if only he will spare her fiancé she, aware of the usurer's illicit passion for her, will part with her virtue. But Mrs. Corcoran was fifty-five, with thin grey hair screwed into a little knot like a walnut. (She sometimes said, "My friends tell me to cut it short, but I always say, 'A woman's crowning glory is 'er 'air.'") Also, she had a moustache.

Scowling to hide a smile, I said, "Who's Arthur? Your son?"

"My 'usband, sir."

"Well get up and stop that noise. Put that overcoat back where it belongs. Is your husband out of work at the moment?"

"Oh no, sir. 'E's unlucky, that's all."

"Is he in jail?"

She was shocked. "My Arthur? Oh no, sir. 'Ow can you say such a thing? 'E's a Perfumer, and 'is nerves are delicate."

"Does he ill-treat you?"

"'E's the best 'usband in the world. Please don't call the police, sir!"

"I'll think about it," I said, taking the bundle of pawn tickets. "What's this one—*Flat-iron, eightpence*?"

"A well-used smoothing iron is worth money, sir. It takes years to get a surface on it. The pawnbroker pays twopence a pound. That'll be my four-pound iron."

"You can't be *that* poor," I said.

"My Arthur ain't like the rest. 'E's not strong. I like to give 'im a little encouragement."

She took out of her bag an old wedding photograph, thirty years old. There stood Mrs. Corcoran in bridal white, stiffly holding a bouquet. Her legs might have been turned to support a billiard table and her huge feet had been crammed into white satin shoes.

Her husband's head came level with her chin. Even then he had an angry, persecuted expression about the eyes and mouth. He appeared to have borrowed striped trousers from an even smaller man and a morning coat from somebody much stouter of build.

"Isn't 'e a love?" said Mrs. Corcoran.

"Absolutely. What do you mean by 'Perfumer'? Where does he work?"

"My Arthur is self-employed. Catch *'im* working under a boss! Arthur 'ates to be dependent on anybody. 'I'll be my own master'—that's *my* Arthur. 'Give me liberty or I'll know the reason why!' It's got something to do with the Social Structure of Society. Arthur was born for Society, only they never gave 'im a chance. 'E's a cut above me, I don't mind telling you, sir."

All is grist that comes to my mill. I encouraged her to tell me more about the Perfumery business.

She went on, "Arthur says it's only the bottle and the label that count. Arthur says if you got a nice bottle and a pretty box you could fill it with water and nobody would know the

difference under this System. Take cold cream. My grandmaw used to make lovely cold cream out of clarified mutton fat. I know 'ow to make it, with a drop of glycerine and water. 'Fancy jars, fancy labels!' Arthur says. 'And advertise, give away free samples!'

"Well, my Arthur went around to the chemists' shops with samples to take orders. 'E tells me, '*The Cream of the Creams* is what we call this, my girl, and if it don't sell retail at a 'undred and twenty shillings a gross, I'm very much mistaken. Keep on clarifying fat, you. I'm going on the road.' So I got 'im a new suit to make an impression. But 'e came 'ome soon, upset. 'E said, 'The System is in a blasted conspiracy against the little man. Wherever I go they tell me they can get cold cream in a bigger and better pot for sixpence. The Capitalists 'ave done me good an' proper, the dirty rotten dogs! 'Why didn't I marry one of these 'eiresses instead of a great lump like you with your clarified mutton fat?'

"I told 'im it wasn't my fault I was a big girl, but that made it all the worse. My Arthur is too much of a gentleman to strike a lady, sir, so 'e broke up all the cups and saucers. I said, 'Just so long as it soothes your nerves, love, I'll drink my tea out of a jam jar.' 'E said, 'Yes, that's right, you would. You and your clarified mutton fat! What did you talk me into it for?' But 'eiresses made 'im think of names 'e'd seen in the paper, and 'e went out to look over Woolworth's. Well, you know, about that time they were selling lavender water and odour cologne for sixpence the pint bottle. My Arthur comes back with one of each, and 'e says, 'Now what we want is fancy bottles and fancy labels, and I can turn sixpence into a five-pound note.'

"So I tell 'im, 'I'd rather 'ave you than a sack stuffed full of fi'-pun notes. I only want you to be content, duck.' So I buckles to, and saves enough for fancy bottles and labels and stuff and my Arthur fills 'em up from the Woolworth's bottles, and goes the rounds.

"'E's back presently, and I never saw 'im in such a temper. 'E shouts, 'Can you imagine what those lackeys of the bourgeoisie said to me? They said they could get my perfume —Odour Corcoran, mind you—for sixpence a pint at Woolworth's! Don't stand there! Say something!' So I said, 'Well, after all, they can, can't they?' 'E tore a chair to pieces, and then 'e said, 'I've a good mind to end it all!' I burst out crying and said, 'Oh Arthur, it breaks my 'eart to 'ear you carry on like that! Don't! I can make enough for

us to rub along on if you'll be a dear and stop smashing the furniture. I've got a strong back.' 'Meaning to say I've got a weak back?' 'e shouts, and chucks a teapot at our wedding photo. Smashed all the glass. That's why I carry it in my bag. 'E went on something awful: ''Ere am I scoffing bread and sausages when I ought to be eating chicken and asparagus!' I told 'im, 'Just soothe yourself, dearie, and you shall 'ave chicken and asparagus.' Got 'em for 'im, too, bless 'is 'eart. Arthur always 'as so much on 'is mind. 'E's a thinker, sir, and it's 'ard to think on bread and sausages. I mean to say!

"Well then I got ill. Arthur 'as a soft 'eart. 'E can't bear the sight of suffering. So 'e left me. But I'm strong as an ox, sir, and when I got better I went to work as a barmaid in a very respectable licensed 'ouse. I put by every penny of my wages, almost, being broken'earted. Besides, something told me Arthur would turn up again, some'ow.

"And so 'e did, one night, in the Public Bar. 'E put down twopence for a glass of mild ale, and then 'e caught sight of me and said, 'Oh there you are. You got thin.' I said, 'So 'ave you.' 'E said, 'Pack your things and come on out of this vulgar boozer!'—very loud. And 'e 'ad 'is way. I was out in 'alf an hour. 'E never said a word 'til we got to a little room 'e was living in over a second-'and shop in East Street. Then, do you know what Arthur did? *'E made me a cup of tea, and put it down in front of me*, and 'e said, 'There, I forgive you.'

"I never was so 'appy, sir." Mrs. Corcoran wiped her eyes.

I said, "And so it has gone on?"

"Oh, my Arthur. 'as 'is schemes. That was twenty-fi' years ago, but 'e'll 'ave the laugh of 'em all one of these days. As for being a good 'usband—why, do you know what 'e said to me when I came out this morning? 'E looked up from 'is newspaper, and 'e said, 'The traffic casualties are something terrible. You mind 'ow you cross the street, my girl, because I don't know what I should do without you.' 'Oo wouldn't think the world of a man like that? You won't go to the police, sir?"

"All right," I said.

"I'm grateful, sir. It's not as if I took anything—borrowed anything—for myself. You won't want me to come back any more, o' course?"

"You can come back," I said.

THE MEN LIVED ON COFFEE AND OVERTIME
THEY WERE A VERY SPECIAL BREED □ □ □

STEAM SCHOONER SKIPPER

BY JACLAND-MARMUR

IN Louie's Embarcadero place on the San Francisco waterfront, there are some men who still remember the steam schooners of the West Coast lumber trade. Those little ships, funnels and pilot houses aft, came butting out of the bar-bound northern ports where all the fine, tall timber grows in rainy fog, nesting their cargo booms in chain-lashed deckloads often as high as the bridge. Fair weather and foul, they hauled the lumber down to where the southern cities spread and grew. The men who sailed them lived, they said, on coffee and overtime. They were a special breed. And old Josh Cumming, he was one of the last.

Captain Joshua took his ease, these days, in Louie's place where he could smell tidewater. When the fog poured in past Fort Point and came tumbling, milk-white, over the city's hills, its sharp aroma gave him comfort, and he always pricked up his ears, hearing the hoot of shipping on the Bay. That's where he was, this quiet day, sitting in one of those leather armchairs at the green-covered table against the wall where only captains sit in Louie's.

"Ain't got the flavour," Josh was growling, deeply gulping another sample from the tall glass at his elbow. "Just ain't got the flavour, Louie."

"Best draught beer in Frisco!" Louie Chavez winked his coal-black eyes. "What's more," he said, "you know it."

Josh sadly shook his head. Palming the pate of his magnificent bald dome, he murmured, "Nothing like the times when . . ." He stopped abruptly, sniffing the air. "Jute!" he

roared. "Heaven's t'Betsy, I smell jute! Somebody bring a ship in from Bombay?"

Josh heard a low, good-humoured laugh. The tall man with the greying temples who had just come in was grinning.

"You've a sharp nose," he told Josh. "Just docked my ship, the *Benton Mariner*. Hard passage from Hooghli. Number three hold's full of fine Calcutta jute."

Josh nodded, solemn as an owl.

Chavez beamed his welcome. "Good to see you once more, Capt'n. Didn't look for you two, four days yet. Captain Jeffrey Barton, Captain Joshua Cumming." Louis ran it all together. "Got your special brandy waiting."

The master of the *Benton Mariner* stretched out his legs at Louie's table, sighing his content and asking, "Something wrong with Louie's beer?"

Josh never got to answer. Louie Chavez, back already with his little tray, growled instantly, "Is nothing wrong with it!" He sat down at the table as it was a quiet day. "Captain Josh don't sail no more. Does surveying now and then for the underwriters. Rest of the time, he bellyaches about my beer."

"Well, Louie, it just ain't the same." Josh turned amazingly blue and seraphic little eyes on the skipper who had just brought in the smell of jute from far across the deep blue water. "Never will be times like that again. Not ever in this world." His voice was melancholy with nostalgia. "I mean when Hattie made the doughnuts and the steward made the beer."

"Hattie?"

"Hattie," Josh said gently. "Hattie was my wife. Better than the best chief mate you'll ever have. Never went to sea without her. Wouldn't dare. Hattie was a strong-willed woman. Hattie made fine doughnuts in the old *Wapama*, and the steward made fine beer."

"*Wapama, Wapama*?" Captain Barton rolled the word across his tongue. "Name sounds familiar." All at once, he grinned. "Must have been in prohibition times."

"For sure!" said Louie, coal-black eyes sparkling. "Why else would the steward make the beer?"

"Sometimes he blew a batch up, too!" Josh snorted. "Made an awful mess."

"Was Julie's fault, I bet. Julie," Louie told the master of the *Benton Mariner*, "was Captain Josh and Hattie's daughter. Used to make a trip sometimes in the *Wapama*. Girl like

that!" His dark eyes lit with admiration. "Julie wear a little sun suit in fine weather. Sun herself on top the deckload of lumber. Who could pay attention to such silly thing like work?"

"*Wapama*..." Captain Benton was still savouring the half-remembered sound of that ship's name. "Wasn't she—?"

"Finest lumber schooner in the trade!" Josh snapped emphatically. "Crew worked on shares. Hattie and me, we owned her. Port Clallam registry. One passage south, we almost lost her. Not to weather, though! Weather never bothered the *Wapama*. Times were bad. We had her mortgaged to the trucks." Josh began to chuckle. "You remember, Louie?"

"Sure. Was maybe thirty-three, thirty-five years ago. I remember good." Louie stood up quickly. "Be back right away. We have another round. On me."

When he set fresh drinks down, Josh was leaning back, eyes closed in reverie, bald dome aglow. Louie Chavez sighed. Between them at the captain's table, Jeffrey Barton smiled. Perhaps he understood he was a living link between seafaring of a simpler time and now. The shape of all tomorrows is revealed, though seldom recognised, in all the shadows cast today, and in a place like Louie's, all the shades of all the seamen who once sailed the oceans have their refuge. Maybe some of them were stirring now, and Jeffrey heard their thin complaint.

He wasn't certain who began to speak, Captain Josh or Louie. But he imagined he could see again, the way he had when he was just a kid at sea, some old steam schooner, loaded to her eyes with chain-lashed lumber, bouncing out across the Humboldt Bar against a heavy gale. Grays Harbour knew them, too, and Willapa. When the Peacock Spit up north was foaming, you might see one, drowned in spume as high as the pouring smoke from her funnel lip, butting across the rolling combers of Columbia River bar while all the big ships wallowed outside, hove to at the Lightship, helpless in such weather. *Wapama* was a ship like that...

That fateful voyage, fourteen feet of northern fir and pine stowed carefully above deck, the *Wapama* left Port Clallam southward bound. Before she reached the mouth of Juan de Fuca Strait, the long swells reached her. They came slowly at her, passed beneath and rolled away beyond. She began her gentle pitching rhythm, rolling just a little in the foamless

trough. It didn't bother anyone. The fact is, Julie Cumming liked it. Julie should have been a boy. Plainly, though, she wasn't. Dressed in close-fitting dungarees and sweater, Julie was sitting on the forward bridge rail, legs dangling, sniffing the weather with the rest.

"Going to blow outside," said Julie.

"Already is." Josh pulled his old felt hat a little firmer on his fine bald dome. "Spring gales been bad. I doubt you'll get your sunning this trip, Julie."

"More's the pity!" Hattie, stalwart and pleasant-eyed, was standing beside the captain in the narrow space between the pilot house and the bridge rail. "Those booms and winches need attention. If only Julie could take the sun up for'ard, the boys would chip that rust like crazy!"

"Heavens t'Betsy, Hattie, y'mean you'd made a decoy out of—"

"No sense wasting what the good Lord gave." Hattie grinned at Julie. "Now, you keep this vessel steady, Josh. Don't want my frying fat all over the galley range. Steward's got his beer all bottled, and the boys are mighty hungry. Have to get my doughnuts fixed before we poke into that weather out there."

Hattie tossed her head and went below, throwing a word of caution to the helmsman as she passed. Mr. Griffin, the first officer, came up the portside ladder to report the cargo chains all taut for sea. Josh nodded pleasantly, but when Mr. Mortimer McLane, the chief engineer, came towards him from the starboard side, Josh groaned. And Julie, seeing that mournful man's approach, swung both her long legs inboard and went slipping out of sight.

"Nothing wrong below, Mort, is there?"

"No." Mr. McLane adjusted his lower plate with care. "Not yet."

Josh sighed. Mortimer McLane could make a repair to his old three-legged reciprocating engine with little else than a handful of Hattie's hairpins. As a matter of fact, he often had. He just wasn't a hopeful man. Josh sighed again.

"Mort," he said, "you got no faith."

"Might work fine for your navigation, Josh. What my steaming boilers need is fuel oil."

"Mort, I know your bunkers ain't too full, but we got enough till Frisco."

"Provided you don't get blown halfway to Diamond Head. Ship ought to have some bunkers in reserve."

"Sure, Mort, sure." Josh had to do his best to soothe the temper of that faithless man. "But you know as well as I do, there's no credit left for the *Wapama* from Seattle to Cape Flattery. Last drydock job and overhaul cost a pile of money. Had to pull the tail shaft, too. And all the time I kept the boys on standby pay. Times like they are, I wouldn't want them hungry on the beach without their doughnuts and their beer. The ship is mortgaged to her marks and every chandler knows it. But we got a fine freight for the voyage now. Stowed better'n a million feet of lumber. That'll get the monkeys off our rigging, come discharge in Frisco. Bledson and Company down there understands it. Spoke to Bledson himself on the telephone before we sailed. Asked him to have an oil barge meet us at the anchorage. Just keep your coffee grinder turning, Mort. We pass Fort Point in Frisco Bay and we'll be all right."

"Hope I don't have to look at it from the end of a tugboat's wire."

That was Mr. McLane. Always looking for the worst. That passage, the rest of them didn't have to. It came to greet them by itself. The gale was roaring outside when they brought the Tatoosh Light abeam. Josh had just time enough to wave a steam-schooner skipper's arrogant greeting to the bridge of an Admiral liner wallowing a quarter mile to starboard. She was rolling like a pendulum, bound inward for Seattle.

It was the last they saw of any shipping in the *Wapama*. Only the radio operator, Herschel Hoggenhorn, held contact with what life was still afloat on such tormented seas. Braced in his little shack abaft the pilot house, cigarette dangling from his lips and earphones at his temples, he could sort the whistling, whining stuttering he heard. It was a gibberish to all but strange magicians like himself. He even wrote down words and phrases on his yellow paper pad, and what he thought was useful information, he passed on to Captain Josh. Most of it was comfortless.

When at last the gale showed signs of moderating, the *Wapama* wallowed north of Point Arena. At least, that's where Josh put her on his well-worn chart, meaning to haul in towards the coast as soon as there was light, hoping for a sight of something to confirm his instinct. Mort McLane, of course, put all his faith in fuel oil instead of foolish navigation. He was certain they were halfway down to Diamond Head,

and growled as much in the *Wapama*'s small saloon, dunking the last of Hattie's doughnuts in his coffee to ease the pressure of their staleness on his store-bought teeth. Josh was about to give the proper answer from the skipper's chair, but Herschel Hoggenhorn came in just then, some slips of yellow paper in his hand.

"Worst gale in twenty years," said Herschel. "Fine weather promised for tomorrow, though. High time." The dangling cigarette between his lips kept bobbing up and down. "*SS Paladin* just sent a CQ out," he went on in his scientific monotone. "Lost her rudder, Capt'n. Taking heavy seas. She's pretty close."

They all looked up at Herschel, who just winked at Julie. Young men always winked at Julie when she smiled like that. Not Mort McLane. His mind was furiously estimating dregs of bunker fuel, considering with inner trembling what a man like Josh might do. Josh kept studying the yellow paper at his elbow, calculating the *Paladin*'s position. Hattie's gentle eyes were watching him in silence. Hattie never spoke until she had to.

"He send an SOS?" Josh asked.

"Hell, no. Been screaming to his Frisco agent, though, to get a Redstack tugboat out. Can't get one. Too many ships in trouble. He'll have to wait his turn."

"Herschel, you go ask that feller does he want our help."

"Already did. The man's no fool. Says he'll be glad to make a captain's contract for a towing job. Lloyd's open form—no cure, no pay. But he won't allow he's in distress and open for a salvage claim."

Salvage! The electrifying word was out. Its impact bounced around the little table in *Wapama*'s small saloon. What seaman hasn't dreamed of sharing such a windfall! To the people of a lumber schooner so beset by debt, it had a wondrous sound. It made Josh sigh with longing. Even Hattie's eyes lit up.

"Heavens t'Betsy!" growled the skipper. "Wouldn't that be..." He shook the grand illusion off, murmuring instead, "Well, even towage pay would—"

"Towage!" Mort McLane let the word explode with so much violence he had to gulp his lower plate back into place. "How the hell you think this little bucket's gonna tow eight thousand tons or more of freight ship into—?"

"Mort, you got no faith. There's more than just one way to skin a cat."

"First, you got to find the cat!" The chief was furious. "Where is she, the *Paladin*? That position she gave don't mean a thing. You don't even know where *we* are!"

"You hurt me, Mort. You hurt me deep." Josh sighed again. "The *Paladin* has a direction finder. She can give us a course to steer."

"And I tell you, I ain't got oil enough to go steaming round the ocean while you hunt—"

"We could sure pay for a lot of oil in Frisco with a nice, fat towage fee."

McLane was sputtering. Before he could further vent his rage, the radio operator's slow voice cut him off. Herschel had been enjoying with gusto this familiar and furious banter between the deck and the engine force.

"Funny thing," he said in a casual tone, as if it meant nothing at all, the way he always did when he gave information that made him proud. "Just before I came down here, that fellow was sending a very interesting message to his Frisco agent. Seems his number-two refrigerator hatch is full of frozen Australian lamb and beef and his reefer engine is conking out. Don't know if they can repair it. Sure sounds worried about that expensive cargo of meat, what with his rudder gone and no tow in sight."

Herschel winked at Julie again, and this time she winked back. Josh kept studying the problem for a pretty tense moment, till a splash of spray struck the for'ard deadlights and all the *Wapama*'s timbers groaned. Hattie thought it was time she took charge.

"Well, don't just sit there, Josh!" Hattie's voice was firm. "You got to go." That settled it.

"Heavens t'Betsy, yes!" Josh was reaching for his battered old felt hat, while Mort McLane just groaned. "Start sending, Herschel. Get the *Paladin* to give us a reverse course on his direction finder. I'll pass the word to Mr. Griffin on the bridge. We're on our way!"

So the old *Wapama*, on a full-ahead bell, turned her tail to the coast for the first time in her long career, standing south and west for the *Paladin*. She made better weather of it in the quartering seas and Josh began to smell for sure that the gale was spent. Julie might get to wear her brand-new sun suit this trip, after all. He was right. She did.

Julie looked wonderful, stretched out on the foredeck lumber in the brilliant sunlight when they sighted the *Paladin*, wallowing in the offshore swell that rolled across the ocean after that

famous gale. Josh and Mr. Griffin saw her empty rudder post each time the big ship's stern lifted ponderously from the water. Josh brought the *Wapama* close aboard, his speaking trumpet ready. High above him in that fancy bridge wing, her people waited, the third mate staring down with undisguised pleasure at Julie. Beside him, the square-faced man with the worried look who was plainly the master, by the gold on his cap and all the braid on his uniform sleeve, bellowed disdainfully the minute his voice was in range.

"You!" he roared at sight of the battered lumber schooner. "You expect to tow me into Frisco with that lousy little pot? Why, you couldn't—"

"Never said I would," Josh called back calmly through his trumpet, distastefully eyeing the brassbounder. "Point is, you can't steer. I can. You pass me a towing bridle, we can hook to you astern. Make you a fine floating rudder like that. We can haul your tail one way and the other for a good enough course to the Lightship. Captain's contract. Two thousand dollars. No cure, no pay."

"Two thou—" The *Paladin*'s skipper leaned wrathfully over his weather dodger, red in the face and fuming. "Are you mad? I can have a tugboat out here to do the job for—"

"Sure, you can. Tomorrow maybe, or maybe the morning after. That would do you right fine, except my radio operator tells me all the seagoing tugs are busy. And even if they weren't, towing a ship like yours is mighty slow in the calmest sea. Lucky you make four knots. Nothing at all like booming home on your own fine turbine with us to steer astern. Save you maybe a couple days. Probably even save that meat in your broken-down reefer, too," Josh went on slyly. "Don't think the underwriters would like it if you turned down help and ruined expensive cargo. Owners wouldn't like it, either. Probably couldn't even make a general average on the loss and have to pay the whole shebang themselves, their captain refusing timely assistance an' all. Master's responsibility, you know. Penny wise, pound foolish."

Josh hesitated long enough for all that to sink in. "You want to send the signed contract across with your heaving line?"

The red-faced skipper stared down in helpless rage. The young third mate up there was also staring down, but it wasn't a bit of his worry. He looked cheerful enough, deeply engrossed in how wonderful Julie looked with nothing on but her sun suit.

"Give you five hundred," the master of the *Paladin* called down from his fancy bridge. "Cash." He was worried, all right. "From my safe."

"If you got five, you got fifteen hundred. Big ship like yours." Josh knew Hattie would be proud of him. "Payable at anchorage or when your docking tug comes alongside. Whichever is first. Payment will waive all other claims."

The *Paladin*'s master spluttered. But he was helpless. He tossed down a last look of outraged wrath before he snarled his acceptance and stomped below to write out the contract.

So the old *Wapama*, looking like a dinghy astern of the *Paladin*, went bouncing eastward at more knots than ever she'd made before in her long career. Josh sat happily astride his bridge rail, calling occasional orders to the helm while enjoying the dizzy speed. The weather was wonderful now, Julie sunning herself up for'ard and the boys all chipping rust like crazy where they could enjoy the sight of her. Josh noticed the *Paladin*'s young third mate up there on the big ship's fantail was paying more attention to Julie in her sun suit than he did to how the strain fetched on the steering bridle. Josh frowned, hoping she wouldn't forget how her father and mother felt about a girl getting mixed up with a sailor. But things were going too fine for such concerns.

"You see, Mort?" he gurgled happily to the chief engineer beside him. "Think of all the bunkers we save! Use hardly no oil at all this way."

"Don't like it," said Mr. McLane, adjusting his lower teeth with his tongue. "I burnt up a lot of fuel while you—"

"Got a whole bargeful waiting for us inside!" Josh chuckled his glee. "Bledson in there heard already about the fine towage fee that's due us, and he knows we're coming in with a big freight to discharge. The *Wapama*'s credit is good again! Bledson's no fool. Just sent us a radio. Says he values our friendship and our business and we ain't to worry at all." Josh chuckled again. "Heard we were low on fuel, so he'll have that oil barge waiting."

The San Francisco bar was smooth when they got there, nothing but a glassy swell between the buoys. There wasn't even any fog. Slack water besides. So the little *Wapama*, still fast to the big ship's stern by the steering bridge, had no more trouble than could be expected keeping the *Paladin* in the channel. Coming past Mile Rock, with the cliffs of the wonderful city on one hand and the hills of Marin on the other, the lumber schooner skipper's blue eyes glowed.

"I feel," he told Hattie, who was watching the proceedings at his side, "I feel like Joshua of the olden times when, after the death of Moses, he led the children of Israel into the land of Canaan."

Hattie appreciated his poetic soul, but her eyes were on the docking tug she saw standing down inside the Bay between Alcatraz and Presidio Shoal. When they were safe in sheltered harbour water with the tug at the *Paladin*'s bows, she knew the *Wapama*'s job was done. Josh knew it, too. So he pulled his whistle lanyard and, as soon as they were loose of the towing bridle, he ranged the deeply laden lumber schooner close aboard.

"Payment is due," he called cheerily aloft to that fancy bridge. "I'll take my money now."

The *Paladin*'s master, decked out in all his braid, was leaning on his teakwood rail with a very casual air.

"Captain," he said, in his most superior quarterdeck voice, "you better forget it."

"Forget it?" Josh whacked the back of his pants. "I got your contract here!"

"Well, so you have." He put his arms on his rail, the better to let them see all the gold he wore. "My radio man reads the code as well as yours." A thin smile flecked across his lips. "Seems you were short of fuel all the time. In the weather we had out there, that's dangerous. So, while I'll have to admit you probably saved my cargo from serious spoilage, my ship itself was never in peril. Yours was. Then, the fact is that while you were steering my vessel, I was towing yours! And there being no contract for the towage, I can name my fee." His smile was pretty triumphant now. "Fifteen hundred dollars, Captain. That will just void the paper you hold and leave us even."

Josh stood there, staring upwards. For the first time in his life, he was speechless.

That's when Hattie, seeing the stunned look of Josh, knew it was time she took the affair in charge. Which she did. Hattie was a strong-willed woman.

"Now you look here, Captain Fancypants!" Hattie's voice rose clear as a bell. "The fact we were short of fuel is the point of the whole damn thing! It gives the *Wapama* a first-rate claim for salvage. I go by the ancient Rooles of Oléron, by the established Laws of Rescue and Salvage upheld many times in Courts of Admiralty sitting under the silver oar, the Restraint of Princes not being herewith involved." Hattie

tapped off the points with vigour, and rattled off all that legal jargon as if she understood perfectly everything she said. "A claim for salvage is most effective when performed at imminent risk and danger to the salvor. That's us! We were short of fuel. Sure. But we could have scooted down Bonita Channel and been safe in port a couple days ago. Instead, we steamed far off our course in that terrible weather to come to your aid, putting our ship, our cargo and the lives of our crew in great peril. And you just now admitted in front of a lot of witnesses that that's what saved your valuable cargo." Hattie put her arms akimbo. "Salvage on that expensive meat would come to a heap more money than what you owe us now. I advise you to pay it. It's the only thing that will waive and void all our other claims. Too bad that's in the contract, but it is. Nothing we'd like better than to have you renege! So you make up your mind real quick! You send that money across or we'll just shove off and slap a fancy salvage libel against your vessel and your freight."

Hattie was breathing hard when she stopped. So was the *Paladin*'s master. He was red in the face again. When he saw Josh make a move towards the engine telegraph far below him on the little *Wapama*'s bridge, he gave up.

"Hold on!" His voice was bleak. "I'll send my work boat over with the cash."

It was the young third mate who brought it. He climbed aboard up for'ard so he could stop for a chat with Julie. When he handed the manila envelope, fat with cash, to Josh, he was wearing a happy grin, glad to know that Julie looked even better in her sun suit, the closer he got to her. Before he went over the side again, he waved to her and winked. Hattie was already heating her pot of fat on the galley range by then. The boys certainly deserved their doughnuts for supper.

The *Wapama* made her anchorage with maybe a barrel of oil to spare.

So it wasn't any wonder that Josh sat chuckling to himself at the captains' table in Louie's place, recalling such wonderful memories.

Jeffrey Barton, the shipmaster who had just come home with a holdful of fine Calcutta jute, was looking at him now with a most peculiar expression.

"That young third mate," Josh murmured to him, "made a date with my Julie right there on deck. Imagine! Snotty

lad. Glad she had sense enough not to marry him, seafaring man and all. Now all I got to worry about is my granddaughter. She—"

"And what," Captain Barton snapped with unexpected anger, "is wrong with a girl who chooses to marry a seafaring man?"

"Hell of a life. Don't take no truck with it at all."

"Well, it happens that snotty young third mate in the *Paladin* was me!" The captain's anger vanished at once. "Julie," he sighed, "was a wonderful girl. I should never have introduced her to our wireless operator." He grinned. "She married him instead. He quit the sea. Heard he got to be a big tycoon in the broadcast business."

"Heavens t'Betsy!" Josh groaned. "You an' me might have been related!"

Just then the doors of Louie's place pushed open and this young couple came in. Fine-looking girl with bubbling blue eyes and a tumble of dark brown hair. The lad with his arm around her had the weather-stained face of a seaman.

"What did I tell you, Jeff? I knew he'd be in here." Her happy voice came tinkling to the captains' table ahead of her. "Hi, Gran'pa!" she said, giving Josh a quick kiss on the top of his shining dome. "I want you to meet Jeff Barton, my husband. We just got married this morning. He sails next week," she went on proudly. "Fourth mate on the Matson Line."

Josh was too stunned to say a word. The youngster murmured to him respectfully before bashfully grinning at his father, telling him this was Sally, the girl he had written about, who was now his wife.

Then Josh heard the shipmaster's guffaw. "Sally," he boomed, while Louie Chavez just grinned, "your grandfather takes no truck with girls who marry sailors!" His laughter rocked Louie's walls. "You better give up, Josh. It must be in the blood. We're related, after all!"

"Heavens t'Betsy, yes!" was all that Josh could mumble after a speechless moment.

Then he gave a prodigious sigh. "Won't never be the same as it was in the old *Wapama* when Hattie was alive." Sadly he shook his head. "But maybe Sally will fry us up some doughnuts."

And he added mournfully, "I guess we'll have to depend on Louie for the beer."

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BY DARRELL BATES

THE THIRD WIFE

IT was very hot in my office that afternoon. Through the window I could see the leaves of the palm trees lying limp and drooping in the windless tepid air, and behind them the sea, flat and shining, like a metal sheet. I undid my tie and let it hang limp and drooping, like the palm leaves.

There was a cough behind me. A quiet cough. I hadn't been very long in Africa, but it didn't come, I knew, from any disorder of the throat; it was just designed with a nice balance of diffidence and firmness to attract attention. I turned my head and looked into a pair of liquid, dark brown eyes.

He had come in very silently through the swing door behind my desk. He had come from the office where the clerks wrote and filed and typed and added up. His name was Khalfani and his age, he had told me once, was in the neighbourhood of thirty-five.

"Yes," I said, "what is it?"

He licked his lips in a nervous gesture, and his toes curled inward in embarrassment. Ordinarily he wore shoes, but inside the office he took them off, as if it were a mosque or someone else's house to be preserved against the dust and impurities of the streets and the narrow, twisting country paths. His tongue looked very pink and moist and fresh against the smooth, brown-black skin and the whiteness of the teeth.

"Trouble," he said. He spoke in Swahili, and Swahili is a very laconic language. "Trouble in the house."

"Again?" I asked.

"Again," he said. Khalfani was a very good clerk and

a very likeable man. He had a gentle-looking face and a gentle manner and a very quiet voice. He never complained of being overworked or underpaid. He never quarrelled with the other clerks or the messengers or the sanitary inspectors, but he was always having domestic trouble at his home.

"Which one," I asked, "is it this time?"

"The youngest." He smiled, and then looked away.

"The youngest child, or the youngest . . .?" I let the rest of my question slide away.

"It is the youngest wife," he said.

"Oh," I said, "I see."

"Yes," he went on, "it is she again."

Two or three weeks before, Khalfani had asked me to adjudicate in a small family dispute. Although I was, as a cadet, the newest and the lowest form of the white man's government in this small, decaying town on the East African coast, I had the advantage of being a stranger, as yet untouched and uncorrupted in Khalfani's eyes by the processes and pressures of local domicile.

Khalfani was a Muslim and he had three wives. The first he had married when he was a young man in his own distant up-country home. He had been a clerk in the government even then, and when he was transferred to another place he had left her behind partly, he explained, to look after his fields and his goats and partly because she was very much a local girl and he didn't think she would transplant very well.

In the place he went to he married someone else. But when some years later he was transferred again he took her with him, her and the two children she had borne him.

They had come then to this place, this small, decaying coastal town and, here, Khalfani had married yet again. Although this newest wife was very young she had, it seemed, a temperament. She was a local girl, with relatives and friends in every street and every coconut grove, and in every court.

"It is a very small matter," Khalfani had explained that first time two or three weeks before, "my third wife has called my second wife a whore."

"Oh," I said. "And nothing more?" It was a very common expression locally.

"Well—" Khalfani hesitated delicately as a gazelle pauses for a moment before it bends its head to drink at a soiled and muddy pool, "—she said something also about her mother, and her mother's mother . . ."

"Ah," I said.

I hadn't in the end done anything about the case myself. I had called in the wife of the sergeant of police. She wasn't a local woman. She came from somewhere else. Her face and her shoulders were creased and dusty with wisdom and experience of many years and many domestic disputes. Somehow or other she settled it, though it was I, because of my office and the colour of my skin, who had undeservedly got the credit, and who now deservedly had earned the sequel on this hot, windless afternoon.

"What is the trouble," I asked, "this time?"

"It is a very small matter," Khalfani said again, using the same disarming phrase and the same deprecating smile that he had used before. "It is just that she has hit the other one."

"The second wife you mean?"

"Yes," said Khalfani.

"Well," I said, "people are always hitting one another, and forgiving it."

"Yes," said Khalfani, but his heart I could see wasn't truly in the word. "Yes," he said again, "by God's will it is sometimes so, but sometimes it is not."

For some time I sat there looking at Khalfani. His liquid brown eyes and his hands, his toes even, that searched for comfort and assurance in the surfaces of the matting on the floor, they all sought my help. I remembered the advice that everyone had given me not to get involved in domestic disputes, never to concern myself with the private affairs of chiefs or policemen or messengers or clerks.

"Why don't you take the matter to the village court?" I asked.

"I'm a stranger here," he said, "and my second wife is a stranger..." His hands spread out, palms downward, and moved slowly like a fan in quiet, unanswerable doubt.

"Why don't you..." I started again. "Why don't you beat her?" I was a bachelor then and full of convictions about the proper regulation of other people's domestic life.

"I am a man of peace," he said. The backs of his arms, I had noticed, were scored and scarred as if from a fall from a bicycle, or from an encounter with some angry domestic cat.

"You are my father and my mother," he went on in a flattery as old as time. "Only you can help me."

In the end I agreed. I said I would come to his house at about six o'clock after my evening walk. I knew already where Khalfani lived. I had often seen the coconut thatch of

his huts through the wide, rich green leaves of a banana clump, and the thin twists of grey-blue smoke that came at sundown from the cooking of his supper.

Almost every evening when I had finished with the day's business, with the small complaints and the sadnesses of the oppressed and the poor, and with the stratagems and the deviousnesses of the men of property and power, I would go out for a walk along a curving stretch of sand that ran between the coconut palms and the sea. It was very quiet there, and empty and untouched, and I would think about the Cotswold Hills, and pubs and girls and London fog and autumn leaves.

Khalfani was waiting for me by the banana clump. In the office he wore a white shirt and khaki shorts and a self-effacing clerkish air, but now I saw he was the master of a Muslim house. He wore a long shift of yellow-brownish cloth and a turban of green and red, and in his hands was a string of amber beads. He greeted me in Arabic.

He had placed some chairs outside the doorway of his house of sticks and clay and thatch. He clapped his hands, and from the inside of one of the smaller huts came a feminine response, long, drawn-out and undulating like the call of a shepherd to his sheep. A moment later a woman emerged with a copper coffee pot and a pair of small flat cups.

"It is her affair, her duty and her joy to bring the coffee," Khalfani said. "She is my second wife."

She looked, I thought, like an equable, amiable girl with a plump, smiling face and plump, smooth-skinned arms. She wore a patterned yellow cloth that left both shoulders bare. I wondered where the third wife was.

I sipped my coffee. Nothing had been said about trouble in the house. The second wife had poured the coffee and clapped her hands softly in salutation and then withdrawn. From inside the hut where she had gone there came a muted medley of twittering sounds such as weaver-birds make when they see a snake in their nesting tree.

"How," I asked Khalfani to show that I had not forgotten what the purpose of my visit was, "are things arranged in your household?"

"You mean . . .?" He seemed curiously hesitant now about his troubles. "Yes," I said.

"Well, this one here is my house. No-one enters it, except to clean and brush, except myself. That hut over there"—he pointed to the hut where the woman had gone—"is the kitchen."

On the other side of the courtyard were two flimsy structures, the sides and roof made of coconut palms plaited together with twine. One, he explained, belonged to the second wife, and the other to the third. "I spend a week in each. One must," he concluded, touching his forehead in a pious gesture, "be fair."

"Yes," I said, "of course."

"The children," he went on, "when they are small and suckling, live in the huts of their mothers. When they are older the boys will sleep in my house, and the girls will lie by the embers of the kitchen fire."

It seemed a very orderly arrangement, and so I said.

"Yes," Khalfani conceded, "it is good."

"Whence then," I asked, "does the trouble come?"

"The trouble comes," he said after a long pause, "from the nature of women."

"Ah," I said with an understanding which I hoped sounded as if it were based on much wisdom and experience. I wondered what on earth he meant, and waited hopefully for him to explain.

"Yes," he went on, "they quarrel over small, unimportant things. Over the colour of a bangle, the cooking of rice, the ownership of a chicken's egg, the degree of respect owed by a neighbour's wife. They quarrel, and so comes abuse and shrill screams and blows. There is no peace in the house."

"Might it not be better," I suggested, "to have just one wife?"

"I have often wondered. I know that it is your custom, and I know that you are people of great wisdom and power."

"Perhaps," I said, "I ought to try and deal now with what I came to do."

"Yes," he said, "I will call them, the second wife and the third that they may speak and lay their quarrel at your feet."

The second wife, the one I had seen before, came first out of the kitchen hut and walked towards us wearing her precedence with ease and pride. Behind her came another figure, slighter and lighter-skinned and more delicately boned. She wore a scarlet cloth that also left the shoulders bare. She was a girl who had a mixture of Arab blood, but like the other wife she wore no veil, nor sandals on her feet. They sank to their knees in movements as smooth and boneless as antelope settling in the grass to sleep and waited with eyes downcast for us to speak.

I looked at Khalfani. When he nodded his consent, I asked the second wife to say what her trouble was.

I waited a little anxiously for the torrent of invective and accusation and complaint to begin. Although I knew by now enough of the language to deal with ordinary, everyday things, I wasn't sure if my fluency would stand up to the details and to the emotional pitch of domestic disputes. So I waited, full of concern and concentration, and waited, and waited . . . But no words came from the kneeling wife.

"Tell me," I said again, "what your trouble is."

At last the woman raised her head and looked at me, and then looked down again at the dusty, shadowed earth.

"I have nothing to say. There is no trouble. I have no complaint."

How very odd, I thought. I turned to the other wife. She shook her head.

"Nor I. I have nothing to say."

Well, I thought to myself, that was easier than I had expected. I couldn't help but feel the beginnings of a small glow of satisfaction, a sense of power almost, that the mere act of my coming to Khalfani's house had resolved the difficulty and restored the peace. I got up and prepared myself with modesty and restraint to accept Khalfani's praise.

"One small thing . . ." It was the voice of the second wife. The words were very quietly spoken, but they were enough to dull the glow and chill the warmth of my self-satisfaction. "Yes," the voice went on, "one small thing. We have no quarrel between ourselves. It was a nothing; it is settled. But," the voice went on, now rising in note and gaining in strength, "we have a quarrel with him."

I looked at Khalfani. His face and his hands and his pose were impassive, there was nothing I could learn from them.

"Yes," the second wife said, "we have a quarrel with our husband. There is too much work for us, for me and for this poor child." Her brown eyes, through the fringes of their long dark lashes were liquid with compassion. "Caring for the children, preparing and cooking the food, cleaning and brushing the huts and the courtyard—it is too much."

Now the third wife took up the tale. "There are the fields to weed and to hoe, the coconuts to be gathered, and husked and shredded, the goats to be milked . . . Me, my companion and I, we can no longer bear the burden of it all . . ."

There was a long silence in the courtyard. The shadows lengthened, and still Khalfani said no word. I looked at him.

He shook his head sadly and then looked away through the palm trees at the sea.

"Ah," I said. I felt the beginnings of a small unease spreading like winter damp from the underside of my knees and the small of my back. Already I knew I was out of my depth. I had no idea what was expected of me now.

"The answer..." it was the voice of the second wife but they seemed to speak in unison, "...the answer is simple. He should, to help us with our tasks, take another wife."

Again I looked at Khalfani. I felt relieved, this was clearly nothing to do with me. But again he shook his head.

"Our master, our husband agrees." It was the voice now of the third wife. "He wishes to help us with our need, and to take for our sake another wife, but—" the voice added in a softer sadder tone "—he cannot."

"Why?" I asked. I knew that Muslims were allowed four wives by law.

"Why?" the voices echoed. "Because he cannot pay the bride-price, that is why." They shook their heads at the grief of it.

"It is true," Khalfani said, adding his grief to theirs. "I am poor—I cannot pay." He spread his hands in despair.

Still in my newness and my greenness I didn't see what on earth this had to do with me. I stood up. It was getting dark. It was time, I thought, for me to go.

"Oh help us," both their voices and hands were stretched towards me. "You are our father and our mother"—the eyes were liquid with entreaty—"and he will repay you, month by month."

Now at last I understood. I looked quickly at Khalfani, and saw in his eyes, before he looked away, his whole purpose and stratagem and complicity.

I sighed. "How much," I asked, "is the bride-price?"

The bride-price was four pounds, eighty shillings, they explained. She was a good girl, and strong, and her father by a strange coincidence was one of my other clerks.

The first month Khalfani repaid me ten shillings as he had promised, and the next month, too. The third month was more difficult; he had other debts and new clothes to buy. He paid me five shillings that month, in the end, and then two shillings and then another two... And as far as I remember, and if my arithmetic is right, I still own two-thirds of the gentle Khalfani's good and strong fourth wife.

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HELP! in the House

Between my thumb, and my head and my legs, the end of the dinner found me a wreck; I felt more like putting my head in the gas oven, than clearing the table and washing up. My eye fell on a decanter of sherry which was standing on the sideboard, and I considered it fixedly for some time. Well, after all, why shouldn't I? One quick nip—it would just give me enough heart to finish off what I had to do. Glancing furtively over my shoulder, I poured out quite half a tumblerful, and tossed it off. Everything went black, and then balls of fire shot up my throat, and exploded in a thousand stars before my eyes. It was not sherry at all—it was whisky! Once I had got over the first shock, I felt terrific. I reeled into the kitchen, polished off the work with the speed of a machine, and rushed home, quite forgetting the iodine, for the pain in my thumb was miraculously cured.

MONICA DICKENS, *One Pair of Hands*

Mrs. Doody, a huge, middle-aged woman with a religious taint, came into and went out of our house like a comet. The second night she was there she went beserk while doing the dishes and, under the impression that father was the anti-Christ, pursued him several times up the back stairs and down the front. He had been sitting quietly over his coffee in the living room when she burst in from the kitchen waving a bread knife. My brother Herman finally felled her with a piece of Libby's cut glass that had been a wedding present of Mother's. Mother, I remember, was in the attic at the time, trying to find some old things, and appearing on the scene in the midst of it all, got the quick and mistaken impression that father was chasing Mrs. Doody . . .

JAMES THURBER, *A Sequence of Servants*

SENSITIVE PLANT

The gardener has been here a year and has given me notice regularly on the first of every month, but up to now has been induced to stay on . . . When I asked him what he had to complain of, he replied "Nothing." I could only conclude that he has a personal objection to me because of my eccentric preference for plants in groups rather than plants in lines. Perhaps, too, he does not like the extracts from gardening books I read him sometimes when he is planting or sowing.

Elizabeth and her German Garden

PIPPED AT THE POST

You hire a cook
but she can't cook yet;
You teach her by candle,
bell, and book yet . . .
Well, she doesn't learn—
you hate to fire her;
To tell a woman
you don't require her—
So you wait and wait,
and before you do it,
What thanks do you get?
She beats you to it!

SAMUEL HOFFENSTEIN

Of all life's plagues
I recommend to no man
To hire as a domestic
a deaf woman.
I've got one who my orders
does not hear,
Mishears them rather, and
keeps blundering near.
Thirsty and hot, I asked
her for a drink;
She bustled out and brought
me back some ink.
Eating a good rump steak,
I called for mustard;
Away she went, and whipped
me up a custard.
I wanted with my chicken
to have ham;
Blundering once more, she
brought a pot of jam.
I wished in season for
a cut of salmon;
And what she brought me
was a huge fat gammon.
I can't my voice raise
higher and still higher,
As if I were a herald
or town crier.
'T would better be if she
were deaf outright;
But anyhow she quits
my house this night.

ANON, *On a Deaf Housekeeper*

There I was making the toast and the Major came into the kitchen. Of course, I didn't take no notice until he come up and caught hold of me. I asked him to let go and stop his games, but he wouldn't, so I hit at his hands with the toasting-fork to make him leave go of me. "Oh, you little vixen! You little spitfire!" he said. "Well, you had no call to lay hands on me," I said, "whatever would Mrs. Dykes say?" And as he wouldn't stop his tricks I said, "Give over, will you?" and hit him again over the knuckles with the toasting-fork. "Damn it, damn it," he said, and then he run out. WILLIAM PLOMER, *Ever Such a Nice Boy*

C

FIREBRAND

Catherine York is the best cook I have had in twenty years or more that I have kept house. She may have lived here about ten months. I believe her honest, not extravagant in the kitchen; she is very clean.

Her temper is like charcoal, which kindles soon, and sparks to the top of the house. She is passionate and ungovernably wilful in her way. We had many quarrels and bore many faults for the sake of the table.

The final quarrel was, my wife, according to custom, sent her maid to see the other maids' candles out. Catherine York bolted her door, and denied her entrance.

I do not charge her with drinking but with being as impetuous as if she did drink. I was afraid we might be burnt in our beds.

CHARLES BERKELEY, *c. 1780*

I don't generally lose my temper with servants; but I had to speak to Sarah rather sharply about a careless habit she has recently contracted of shaking the tablecloth, after removing the breakfast things, in a manner which causes all the crumbs to fall on the carpet, eventually to be trodden in. Sarah answered very rudely: "Oh, you are always complaining." I replied: "Indeed, I am not. I spoke to you last week about walking all over the drawing-room carpet with a piece of yellow soap on the heel of your boot." She said: "And you're always grumbling about your breakfast." I said: "No, I am not; but I feel perfectly justified in complaining that I never can get a hard-boiled egg. The moment I crack the shell it spurts all over the plate, and I have spoken to you at least fifty times about it." She began to cry and make a scene . . .

GEORGE and WEEDON GROSSMITH, *The Diary of a Nobody*

Poetic Justice

"There's been an accident!" they said,
"Your servant's cut in half; he's dead!"
"Indeed!" said Mr. Jones, "and please
Send me the half that's got my keys."

HARRY GRAHAM, *Ruthless Rhymes*

BY HARRY MARK PETRAKIS

PA & THE SAD TURKEYS

SOME damn fool once said that all a Greek had to do to make money in a restaurant was to enter partnership with another Greek and watch the cash register. The guy that started that rumour better stay away from my pa.

Our place wasn't classy enough to be called a restaurant. It was a drab lunch room in a factory district near the railroad yards. We had six tables and twenty-six stools. They were all filled for an hour over lunch, and the rest of the day and night a customer might think the place was a graveyard.

There were three of us as partners, and that was a mistake. Pa and Uncle Louie had been partners for a number of years. When the army drafted me, Pa forgave me for having left college after one year and, in a flurry of patriotism, he and Uncle Louie cut me in for an equal share of the business. They wanted me to have something to come back to a few years later. When I returned in a month with a medical discharge for a bad knee, Pa was sorry, but by then the papers had been signed.

Not that I wanted to stay in the lunch room for ever, but I was still developing my character and had nothing special that I wanted to do yet besides make a fortune playing the horses. The lunch room was near a reputable bookie, and I had to spend the time between races somewhere. I worked out in front as a waiter, and Pa and Uncle Louie worked in the kitchen as chefs, dishwashers, butchers, and anything else that came up.

Business was terrible and getting worse. About four in the afternoon, when we hadn't seen a customer in two hours,

Pa would stamp out of the kitchen and begin. "May the fiend that sold us this place fall in a sewer," Pa said. "May his back swell with boils and his lying tongue turn black."

"Take it easy, Pa," I said. "That won't bring in any business."

Uncle Louie came to stand smiling in the kitchen doorway. He and Pa were brothers, but they weren't a bit alike. Pa was big with a barrel back and the thick neck of a bull. A heavy head of hair, iron-grey at the temples, came down over his forehead until it almost merged with his bushy eyebrows. I loved him, but I had to admit he resembled a bull, with a disposition to match.

Uncle Louie was an amiable idiot. I don't say that with any intended disrespect. I loved him too. He was a good-natured gentle little man who always smiled. That might seem commendable except that Uncle Louie carried smiling too far. Tell him about a terrible car accident with the occupants smashed and bleeding, and Uncle Louie would listen carefully and smile and shake his head. Working with Pa in the kitchen would have driven a normal man crazy. Uncle Louie was insulated.

Pa fixed me with a baleful eye. "Lucky for me you went one year to college," he said. "Tell me, how did you manage four years of education in that one year?"

Uncle Louie smiled broadly.

"Cut it out, Pa," I said.

"Sure," he said and shook his head violently. "I will cut it out when you stop playing the horses and start thinking of a way to save us. This place is a graveyard. You hear me, hoodlum, a graveyard, and you are standing around with a shovel."

"Shut up, Pa," I said. "Here comes a customer."

Pa stared in disbelief as a leather-jacketed baggage-handler shuffled in the door and sat down at the counter. Uncle Louie scurried back to the kitchen.

I brought the customer a glass of water. Pa elbowed me aside and handed him a menu. "Coffee," the man said.

For a moment Pa's face twisted in a silent snarl.

"With or without a toothpick?" Pa asked, and he stood above the man with his hairy arms spread wide on his hips. The man looked up as if suspecting a joke, but Pa was grim.

"Have you had lunch?" Pa asked.

The man gaped at Pa for a moment and then numbly shook his head.

"What are you waiting for?" Pa said. "By skipping a meal you do injury to your stomach. Regular eating habits assure a sound body." He shook his head sadly. "Your appearance is unhealthy. When did you last see a doctor?"

The man nearly fell off his stool in shock and outrage. He stumbled to the door and, with his hand on the knob, turned and spoke in choked indignation. "You must be nuts!"

The door slammed behind him.

"Nice going, Pa," I said. "That should help pick up business."

Uncle Louie stuck his head out of the kitchen door. "Thomas," he said to Pa. "I was waiting to hear an order. Where is the patron?"

"Coffee!" Pa said. "At a time when I am faced with eviction for non-payment of rent, that lout comes in and orders coffee."

"He doesn't care about our troubles," I said.

"Who does?" Pa said and laughed in a show of frivolity. "Does my horse-playing son care? My educated son who spent one hard year in college and got a degree in the Daily Treble."

"The Daily Double, Pa," I said patiently. "Get it right."

"Thank you," Pa said. "I am happy you are around to correct me. I am so happy I wish I could die now in the middle of my joy."

"Don't expire yet, Pa," I said. "The wholesale man is due in for the meat order for next week."

"No order," Pa said sombrely. "They have refused us further credit unless we put up cash."

"I'm sorry, Pa," I said. "I'm broke."

Uncle Louie ducked into the kitchen. He might have been simple, but he knew when to disappear. Not that he had any money either, but he didn't want to put Pa to the trouble of asking.

Pa laughed again without mirth. "In this way does it end," he said. "Next week my doors will close for good. People will whisper all across the city that Thomas Lanaras has failed. The icebox has nothing left but three small pork chops."

"One chop left, Pa," I said apologetically. "I got hungry late last night."

He fixed cold, furious eyes on me.

"Can't we have a macaroni and spaghetti festival next week?" I asked.

"Do me a favour," he said slowly. "Don't think. Don't talk. Don't make a suggestion." He walked stiffly to the kitchen. In a moment I heard him wailing to Uncle Louie.

Sam Anastis came in about four-thirty. He was a renegade wholesale meatman specialising in animals that died natural deaths. He had the wide hot smile of a professional con man, a high-pitched shrill voice, and he always looked back over his shoulder at intervals as if afraid he was being followed. He carried a brown bag that he held tightly as if it contained some peerless treasure.

I lifted my nose out of the racing form. "Pa," I called out. "Sam Anastis is here."

"Tell him to drop dead," Pa shouted from the kitchen.

Sam Anastis laughed heartily. "What a sense of humour that man has," he said brightly.

"He's a riot all right," I said.

Sam Anastis walked on small quick feet to the swinging door and opened it a little. "Mr. Lanaras," he called out gaily. "It is me, Sam Anastis. I want to talk to you."

"Go to hell, Sam Anastis!" Pa roared.

Sam Anastis laughed shrilly. When he could catch his breath he shook his head at me. "What a man," he said. "Always kidding."

He opened the door slightly again. "Mr. Lanaras, please come out now," he said. "Sam Anastis has something for you at a price. I could have sold to any of a hundred restaurants, but when this golden opportunity came my way, I thought of you."

Pa said something shocking in Greek that called in question the parentage of Sam Anastis.

"All right, sir," Sam Anastis grinned slyly. "All right. I'll have to take my proposition to Mr. Botilakis. How he will laugh when I tell him I offered it to you first."

He finished and stepped back quickly. A moment later Pa came violently through the swinging door. Uncle Louie followed smiling behind him. If there was anything that could set Pa's teeth on edge, it was mention of our arch competitor, the Olympia Lunch Room on 15th Street, run by that blackhearted Macedonian, Antonio Botilakis.

Pa pointed a big warning finger at Sam Anastis. "I give you thirty seconds," he said. "At the end of that time I personally will kick you from here into the gutter. Now begin!"

Sam Anastis wasted ten seconds trying to decide whether Pa was serious. When he realised Pa was, he hastily opened the bag he was carrying and drew out something long and scrawny.

"Look!" he said triumphantly. "Look!"

"*What* is it?" Pa asked.

Sam Anastis looked hurt. He appealed to Uncle Louie. "You know what it is, of course."

Uncle Louie furrowed his brow. He smiled sympathetically at Sam Anastis. "It looks familiar," Uncle Louie said brightly.

Sam Anastis looked heartbroken. "It is a turkey," he said. "A genuine milk-fed purebred turkey. A wonderful specimen."

"Of course," Uncle Louie said. "A turkey."

Pa looked incredulous.

"That is a turkey?" he asked.

"It is some kind of bird all right," I said. "I think I can make out a wing."

Sam Anastis laughed, and Uncle Louie laughed loudly with him.

"Like father like son," Sam Anastis said. "Both always clowning."

"If that is a turkey," Pa said sombrely, "it has been hit by a truck."

"No!" Sam Anastis exploded in protest.

"Why is it so dark?" I asked.

"I'm glad you asked," Sam Anastis said. "This turkey was raised on a farm in Florida. Healthy sunshine all year round."

He made as if to hand the bird to me.

"I don't want to touch it," I said. "I don't want to catch whatever it was that killed it."

"I was in Florida once," Uncle Louie said.

"Sam Anastis," Pa said, "I have known you for ten years. I knew your father. In the old country he was arrested three times for trying to sell the Parthenon to tourists. For you to come in here and suggest I buy that bird is an action so arrogant even he would not have dared."

"What is the matter with this turkey?" Sam Anastis asked in a grieved voice.

"What did the autopsy show?" I asked.

"In Florida it was very pleasant," Uncle Louie said. "I spent much time on the beach."

"Get out," Pa said, and he waved his big fist towards the door. "Go sell that abomination to Botilakis."

Sam Anastis backed towards the door still dangling the turkey.

"You are making a terrible mistake," he said shrilly. "I have a crate of these fine birds. You can have them for twelve cents a pound. At twelve cents a pound your profit will be enormous."

Pa stopped short. "Twelve cents a pound?" he asked incredulously.

"We stayed at a big hotel," Uncle Louie said. He smiled warmly. "The windows looked out on the water."

"Pa," I said warningly. "Forget it. Serve those birds and the police will put us away for life."

Sam Anastis took a step forward.

"Any chef can fix an attractive bird," he whined eagerly. "These birds are a real test. A lot of boiling to tenderise the meat. Plenty of seasoning to lend aroma. A good thick gravy. Believe me, these birds are a challenge I would be proud to accept if I were a chef."

"Get out, Sam Anastis," I said. "I'm only a sad horse player, not a murderer."

"Wait," Pa said. "Let me examine that bird a bit more closely."

"A turkey," Uncle Louie said. "Of course."

Pa took the bird and turned his nose away. He pressed the bony thigh. "There is meat there," he said. "And there. And there. There is considerable meat on it."

"What did I say?" Sam Anastis shrieked. "A lovely bird and for the price, a steal. I make nothing on the sale, but I hope to keep you as friends always."

"How much will the crate come to?" Pa asked.

"Eighty pounds," Sam Anastis said quickly. "Exactly nine dollars and sixty cents."

"I'll give you seven-fifty," Pa said.

"I contracted for twelve cents a pound," Sam Anastis said, outraged. "I gave you the best possible price. I saved them for you. Now you make a ridiculous offer."

Pa shrugged. "Forget it," he said and turned as though to go.

"Wait!" Sam Anastis cried. "It has been a long day. My feet hurt. I'll take it."

He started quickly to his car to get the turkeys before Pa changed his mind.

"Pa," I said. "You must be nuts. Poisoning people is no joke."

"Shut your face about poison," Pa said. "This is a miracle which has been provided to save us from bankruptcy and disgrace."

"Maybe they will let you work in the prison kitchen," I said.

"Zipper your mouth!" Pa said. "You have no faith. Uncle Louie and I will fix those birds. We will fix them so they would be fit to serve on the table of a king."

Sam Anastis came in struggling with the crate.

"Where?" he gasped.

"In the kitchen," Pa said, and there was a wild gleam in his eyes.

That night after closing, the lights blazed in our kitchen. Pa and Uncle Louie placed great pots of water to boil on the stoves. When the kitchen was shrouded in steam, they threw in the turkeys. They boiled them all night, the two of them fretting around the pots like a pair of mad chefs. The smell was awful.

On Saturday morning it was hard to get an order out of the kitchen because Pa and Uncle Louie were working frantically over those birds. Some of the smell from the night before still lingered, and when the customers wrinkled up their noses and complained, I told them a gas pipe had broken.

We did a light lunch business because it was Saturday, and then the place emptied again. By sometime that afternoon the first batch of turkeys had been out of the ovens a couple of hours and the second batch was in. Pa came out and sat at one of the tables with a pad of paper and a pencil, mumbling to himself as he figured out the menus for the coming week.

"Monday will be roast young tom turkey," Pa said. "Tuesday, turkey and noodles. Wednesday, hot turkey sandwich. Thursday, chicken *à la* king. Friday, turkey hash." He finished pleased at his sagacity.

"You forgot chicken croquettes," I said.

"Shut up," Pa said.

I buried my head back in the racing form and wondered how I might sneak out to make a bet in the fifth race at Tropical Park.

Everything was quiet. No other sound than Pa mumbling and a mail truck rumbling past in the street outside. Just

then I heard the swinging door from the kitchen, and I looked up.

"Pa, look!" I said. "Look!"

Uncle Louie stood in the doorway. For the first time I could remember he wasn't smiling. There was a look of incredible distress on his face, and he held his hand across his stomach.

"Louie, what is the matter?" Pa asked.

Uncle Louie tried to speak, but no sound came. Before our eyes his face seemed to darken and his cheeks seemed to swell. He made another valiant effort to speak, and only a deep mournful croak came out.

"Louie!" Pa hollered. "What has happened?"

"Pa!" I shouted. "I bet he ate some turkey!"

When he heard the word "turkey," Uncle Louie stiffened as if he had been shot. Then he stepped forward, placing one foot down carefully, and followed it slowly with the other. He made one final mighty effort to smile. When that failed he spun round like a top, once, twice, propelled by some relentless force, and then he collapsed on the floor flat on his back.

"He is dead!" Pa wailed and ran to him. "Louie is dead!"

"A stomach pump!" I shouted. "His stomach must be emptied!" I rushed to the phone.

Pa knelt weeping beside Uncle Louie. "Speak to me, my beloved brother," Pa beseeched him. "Speak to me, companion of my youth. Speak!"

Uncle Louie stared in anguish at the ceiling.

I got Doctor Samyotis, who had a little office on the boulevard about a block away, and he promised to come at once. I rushed over to where Pa cradled Uncle Louie's head just in time to hear a terrible rattle rise out of Uncle Louie's throat.

"His death cry!" Pa shouted. "Get a priest!"

"Take it easy, Pa," I said. "The doctor will be here in a minute."

"Too late," Pa wailed. "My brother will be gone."

"Don't give up hope, Pa," I said. I opened Uncle Louie's collar. He sure looked awful.

The door banged open, and Doctor Samyotis came in. He took one look at Uncle Louie. "In the kitchen," he snapped. "Carry him back there."

Pa and I picked up Uncle Louie and carried him into the kitchen.

"Put him on the table," Doctor Samyotis said. "Get a pail. The ambulance is coming."

We set him down, and I felt a little sick myself. I left Pa to help the doctor and walked back to the front. A truck driver had come in and was nonchalantly sitting at the counter.

"We are closed," I said.

"I just want a bowl of soup," he said.

"We are closed," I said. "Get out."

"Whadyumean closed?" he said. "I just want a bowl of soup."

From the kitchen Uncle Louie wailed a terrible cry of anguish and doōm.

The guy made it to the door in a single leap. I locked up and sat down to wait. I was worn out.

In a few moments the ambulance pulled up in front of the store. I unlocked the door, and two white-coated guys came in with a collapsible stretcher. I waved them into the kitchen.

In another few moments they came out carrying Uncle Louie. He was covered with a blanket to his throat, and a towel was wrapped around his head. All that showed was his mouth, and poor Uncle Louie wasn't smiling.

Pa came out with Doctor Samyotis.

"Doc," I asked, "will Uncle Louie be all right?"

"He will be all right," Doctor Samyotis said. "Just sick for a while."

The attendants loaded Uncle Louie into the ambulance. A small crowd of railroad workers gathered around outside and peered in through the plate-glass window.

Pa started to get his coat. Doctor Samyotis stopped him. "You stay here!" he barked. "Go bury those turkeys!"

Pa stared shamefaced at the floor.

The doctor walked out and slammed the door. The ambulance pulled away.

A few guys still stared through the window. Pa made a fierce face through the glass, and they scattered. He came back and sat despondently at one of the tables.

"What have I done?" Pa said, and he rocked back and forth like a mourner. "What have I done?"

"It wasn't entirely your fault, Pa," I said.

He shook his head sombrely. "He might have died," he said. "Poor Louie might have died."

"It would have been worse if it was a customer," I said. "We might have got sued."

"Shut up!" Pa said. "You have no family feeling."

I didn't say anything more because I knew how stricken he was about Uncle Louie.

At that moment the front door opened and Sam Anastis came in as if he had sprung out of the earth. He stood beaming his hot wide smile at us. I was afraid to look at Pa.

"Greetings," Sam Anastis glowed. "I was passing by and thought I would stop and inquire how went the turkeys? Are they roasted yet?"

I finally looked at Pa, and his face was impassive, but there was a blue vein swelling in his forehead and his cheeks were flushed red with blood.

"Welcome, Sam Anastis," Pa said in a strangely gentle voice. "What a friend you were to bring those turkeys to me."

"What did I tell you?" Sam Anastis trumpeted. "I made nothing on that sale, but for friends like you I don't care."

He saw Pa approaching. For a moment a cloud of uneasiness swept his face. Then it was too late. Pa reached him, and I held my breath. But Pa just clapped him softly on the shoulder.

Seeing Pa close enough to feel the heat shaking off his cheeks made Sam Anastis realise something was wrong. He tried to smile away his fear, but by that time Pa had his arm and began to walk him back to the kitchen.

"Come and see the turkeys, Sam Anastis," Pa said. "I will make you a little sandwich."

Sam Anastis looked shocked. He had an iron-clad rule against eating anything he sold. "I have just eaten," he laughed weakly. "I am not a bit hungry. I never eat this time of day."

By the time they got to the kitchen door, Sam Anastis was dragging his heels. Pa graciously all but lifted him through the door and turned back to me. "You!" he barked. "Call Doctor Samyotis!"

I went quickly to the phone and dialled the doctor's office. He wasn't back yet, and I left urgent word with the nurse for him to come. For Pa's sake, I hoped he would make it in time.

As I hung up, a terrible cry of lament and despair sounded from the kitchen. I got my coat and hurried out of the door. I didn't want to go through all that again. Besides, if I hurried, I might still get a bet down in the last race at Jamaica.

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BY CHRISTIAN MILLER

Under the Clock

His mind raced in circles; and his collar seemed half a size too small

MR. HENRY WILLIAMS was a very methodical young man. Indeed, he was so methodical that anyone judging him by his habits rather than by his unlined forehead and thick head of hair might have wondered if he warranted the description, young. Certainly his contemporaries in the office where he worked, always finding him busy at his desk when they rushed in with only seconds to spare before the arrival of the boss, classed him more as an old fuddy-duddy than as one of themselves.

Henry was methodical in everything he did. At exactly seven-thirty each weekday morning, he got up, shaved, and did exercises before an open window. At eight, he sat down to a breakfast of bacon and egg, tea and toast, prepared for him by his landlady; and at eight-thirty-seven precisely, he strode briskly in at the entrance of his local underground station so as to be standing on the platform, his morning paper folded neatly under his arm, when the eight-forty to the City rumbled in. He even had a special place to stand on the platform—under the clock. For he had worked out that the carriage that stopped there pulled up exactly opposite the exit at the station where he got out. Except when disrupted by something that even he could not organise—such as an attack of 'flu—Henry's routine never altered.

It must have been early spring when he first noticed the girl on the opposite platform, for later he remembered thinking how the sight of her white gloves had reminded him of the snowdrops in the small park that he passed on his walk to the station. He was standing waiting for his train. Idly, across the tracks, he let his eyes travel up from the white gloves, note briefly a discreet navy-blue coat, and then come to rest on

a serious, pretty little face. The girl was glancing anxiously down the line, as if trying to hurry up the train for which she was waiting.

Silly girl, thought Henry. I bet she's late for work. At that moment his own train arrived, and he stepped firmly in, forgetting her completely.

But the next morning she was there again, standing in front of the map of the underground lines, just as she had done the first day.

She looks sort of scared, Henry mused. Perhaps she's starting her first job, and isn't quite sure which train to catch to be sure of arriving on time.

Feeling slightly smug in his own knowledge of the underground schedules, he adjusted his tie and eyed her across the two sets of rails that separated them. Yes, really, he thought, it was nice to see such outstandingly clean gloves.

As the year wore on, Henry grew accustomed to seeing the girl on the opposite platform. Gradually, she was losing her air of shyness; she would lean almost nonchalantly against the underground map, turning the pages of her morning paper as she waited for her train, secure in the knowledge that it always arrived at almost exactly the same time as the one on the opposite platform. As the weather grew warmer, her coat was replaced by a spring suit, and that, in turn, by a little linen dress, but always she wore white gloves.

Henry found himself speculating about her. She must wash those gloves every night. Did she live in digs like his, where washing clothes in the handbasin was forbidden? Or did she have a smart little flat—shared, perhaps, with a sophisticated girlfriend—with all the luxury of a private bathroom? In any case, thought Henry, she was rather his sort of girl: methodical, neat, punctual . . .

His sort of girl? Henry surprised himself. Why, he had never had *any* sort of girl—his life had been so well organised, so filled with routine, that somehow he had never had time to make friends with anyone of the opposite sex. But now that the idea was in his mind, he started looking at the girl on the other platform with a fresh interest.

Yes, she definitely *was* pretty. And even prettier when she smiled, he discovered one morning, when he caught her eye across the tracks and ventured a tentative smile himself. After that, it was only a short step to a regular morning greeting. He would take his place under the clock; she would come down her escalator, and he would raise his hat ever so slightly

and smile at her. And she would smile faintly back, and wave her paper just an inch or two in the most casual of all possible greetings. Then she would, very deliberately, start reading her paper, as if to say, So much and no further. And he would get into his train.

Sometimes his train was still in the station when hers drew in, and he would be tantalised by the sight of her—only the thickness of two sheets of glass away—as she took her place in the train going in the opposite direction.

After a time, Henry tried to spot her before he went into the station, but he never saw her, and he dare not hang about the entrance for fear of missing his own train. He began to get desperate.

It was the desperation of love. It had been the little white gloves, the punctuality, that had first made him notice her, but now it was the fair hair, that sometimes blew wantonly in the subterranean draughts of the station, the slim nylon-covered legs, the shyness of her morning smile, that made him hurry so eagerly to his place under the clock. One hot summer morning she was not there, and his heart lurched with fear as he wondered whether she might have changed her job, or left the district. But two weeks later she was back, looking sunburnt and even prettier than before, so it had only been a holiday after all.

He looked across at her, where she stood, radiant with summer, by the map on the Down line, and smiled eagerly, almost boldly. She looked back at him, where he stood under the clock on the Up platform, smiled briefly, and lowered her eyes to her paper.

Dammit, thought Henry, this just can't go on. And the realisation of how miserable he would have been if he had not seen her again made him resolve to take a desperate step. Yes, he would do it, he promised himself—the very next day, he would do it!

The following morning, striding briskly towards the underground, Henry found that his heart was racing uncomfortably fast. His collar suddenly seemed half a size too small, and the handle of his briefcase felt warm. He hurried past the barrier, brandishing his season-ticket, but instead of taking his usual escalator, he turned resolutely in the other direction.

He was halfway down the other escalator before he realised that he didn't know what he was going to say to her.

Good morning? Would that do? But how could he

explain why he was travelling in the opposite direction to the way he usually went? His mind raced in circles as the stairs melted away in front of him and precipitated him on to the Down platform.

Although he arrived there every evening on his way home, it looked strangely unfamiliar at that early hour. He halted for a moment, uncertain, and looked around. Where was the girl—his girl? Why wasn't she there, in her usual place by the map? His heart sank; he knew he would never summon up enough courage to try this gambit a second time.

Then, just as the two trains—his and hers—entered the station from opposite ends, he saw her. She was standing on the other side of the tracks, on the Up platform under the clock—Henry's clock. Her white-gloved hands were clasped nervously in front of her, but she was smiling. And this time it was a smile so radiant that it seemed to light up the whole station.

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Take me, for instance

BY HUGH B. CAVE

FOUR of us heard the thing, it turned out later.

Arthur Pottle, who lives alone, was in his yard calling to his dog. "It was pretty dark, you recall," he said, "and when I heard the humming I thought it was old man Sheldon's bees. But it wasn't. It was too high up."

Moddy Williams was in bed with his missus and she'd just told him for heaven's sake leave her alone, it was too hot for nonsense. It *was* a hot night, so he got up to open the window. "That damn window sticks all the time," he said. "It let go with a clap of thunder, and I thought the other noise was just an echo. It wasn't, though. It kept on for a good half minute more."

At Jeff Watley's place it was Margaret, Jeff's daughter, that heard the thing. To tell the truth, Jeff had been at the bottle again and was in no fit condition to hear anything. "I was in the kitchen making him some coffee," Margaret said. "I opened the back door to let some air in, and what came in was the humming. The thing was right over the house, whatever it was."

I couldn't find anyone else who'd heard it, though I did a lot of asking around the village. So the four of us held a meeting at my house, finally, and I got out a map.

"Take a good look at this," I said. "Arthur's house is here. Moddy's here, Margaret's here, and mine right here. Now we don't know which way the thing came because none of us knows who heard it first. But it came one way or the other in a straight line, right over us."

They couldn't argue with that. But Margaret, who's a real

smart girl in spite of her sotted pa, made a point I hadn't thought of.

"We don't know it was landing," she said. "You couldn't tell from the sound. At least, I couldn't."

The others said exactly the same, and I had to agree with them.

"Of course, it *could* have been landing," Margaret admitted, studying the map again. "If it came from the west, it could have been making for Fenley Thompson's big field here. There's no better place to land in these parts."

We decided we ought to go out to Fenley Thompson's and have a look. Fenley would probably laugh at us—he was the schoolmaster and a bit of a snob—but he wouldn't laugh too loud. Margaret was engaged to him.

We went in my old car and stopped at the house first, of course. Fenley wouldn't take kindly to us prowling about without permission. Sitting in his study, which was just about walled with books, we told him what we'd heard and what we suspected.

He looked at us as if we were daft.

"Never in all my days have I heard such utter nonsense," he said. "What do you expect to find? A ship from space? Little green men running around?"

"Now, Fenley," Margaret said, "we heard this thing and we just want to have a look, that's all."

"*I* didn't hear anything," he said.

"You weren't home. You were visiting your sister."

That stopped him. He'd forgotten. "Very well, I shan't stop you," he said. "Go and look your heads off. But it's ridiculous, and I'm shocked that you, Margaret, are mixed up in this."

We thanked him and went into the field, and we looked. And he was right: we didn't find anything. The grass was straight up everywhere, none of it singed or flattened, not even a daisy out of place.

When we got back to the house, Fenley gave us the treatment we expected.

"It's lack of schooling that makes people behave the way you do," he said. "I don't exclude you either, Margaret. Now take me, for instance. *I* don't believe in this nonsense because I'm well enough read to know better."

"We know what we heard," I argued.

"Fiddlesticks! What you heard was an airplane or the wind."

We let it go at that. But on the way home Moddy Williams gave a snort. "For Mr. Fenley Thompson's information—no offence to you, Margaret—there wasn't no plane within a hundred miles of here at that hour. Nor there wasn't a bird-breath o' wind that night neither. 'Take me for instance' indeed! The only way to take him is for a fool!"

For a week or so, nothing more happened. Nothing we could be certain of, at any rate. I got the feeling I was being watched a time or two, and the others said they did too, but it wasn't a thing we could be sure about.

When matters did come to a head, there was no doubting them. We *knew*.

There were three of us in the pub that evening—Moddy, me and young Jeremy Bliss—along with Bessie Barnett, the proprietress. Jeremy was a nice young lad, a carpenter; he was sweet on Margaret Watley, though of course it didn't do him any good, with her engaged to the schoolmaster. We were sitting there in the pub having a pint or two, when all three of us heard the humming at the same time. Only this time it wasn't in the sky or so loud; it was just a whispery sort of humming right there in the pub with us.

It was Bessie Barnett—she's a big, no-nonsense kind of woman—who figured it out. With her hands jammed on to her hips, she peered up at the ceiling and said, "Now what in thunderation is that?"

That's where the sound was, up close to the ceiling as though there were bees up there, only it was not quite the same.

"All right," I said out loud. "Who are you and what do you want?"

"What does 'thunderation' mean?" a kind of squeaky voice answered.

"What?"

"We are sorry. Your language many so words has, it for us is hard. You new ones keep using."

"What the devil language do you speak?" Moddy asked.

"You not could it learn," the voice said. "You not could manage the sounds. We must yours learn."

"Well, you seem to be doin' pretty good," young Jeremy Bliss said, "except you don't put things in very good order yet. Just keep tryin' and you'll get into it all right. How many of you are up there?"

"Oh, many."

"How'd you get here?"

"You do not a word it for have," another voice said. "But you it heard."

"Well, I'm glad that's settled," I said. "But if we heard it, where is it?"

"We do not think wise it to tell that," the first voice said. "You try might to it harm."

"Is it in Fenley Thompson's field?"

"Indeed yes, in manner of a speaking. But you not can it see."

"Invisible, eh?" Jeremy said. "Like you up there. Can you make yourselves visible just for a second or two maybe, so we'll know who we're talkin' to?"

"Some of us can," the voice said. "Wait."

Anyone walking into the pub would have thought we were crazy, I guess, the three of us and Bessie gazing at the ceiling like that, waiting. It took a long time, too. And even then we couldn't be sure we saw anything.

It seemed to me—and afterwards the others said the same—that little blue lights began to come on after a while. Not bright, mind you—just glowy things, drifting about under the ceiling in slow motion. If they were real, they were only just. I got an idea I could catch one maybe, if I was sly about it, so I climbed up on a stool slowly and deliberately, then shot my hand out.

All the lights went out—if they'd ever been on in the first place.

"You not should have that done," the voice said. "We not do mean *you* any harm."

"What do you want with us then?" Moddy demanded, reasonably enough.

"We want to take one you of back us with, for study," the voice said. "But not his will against, of course. That not would right be."

"Back where?" I said.

The name of the place sounded like Sutaurus.

I didn't have any idea where Sutaurus was, or what, and neither did Moddy or Jeremy or Bessie Barnett. We looked at each other and shook our heads. Then we looked at the ceiling again and I said, "Well, if you fellers got any idea that one of us is going to volunteer, we ain't. Moddy and me learned that in the army, and Jeremy here is too smart. We're staying right here."

"And if you think you can *take* us any place, you just try it," Bessie said, grabbing a broom.

"Oh, we lots of time have," the voice said. "We can wait."

"Wait all you like," Bessie said, "but just wait some place else."

"Very well," the voice said. "But we watching be will."

When Moddy and Jeremy and I left the pub, we held a conference. What we ought to do, we decided, was go out to Fenley Thompson's and look for the vehicle again. "We can talk all we like," I said, "even with Bessie backing us up, but people won't believe any of this until we find the thing those fellers came in. We *got* to find it to save our reputations."

"Fenley won't like it," Jeremy said. "He's still annoyed with Margaret about your last visit."

"I don't see how she can stand that man," Moddy said. "A sweet, simple girl like her."

"Well, he reads books and I don't. Not many, at any rate."

"There's things a lot more comforting than books on a winter night," Moddy grumbled. "You ask me, she ought to chuck—"

"Now, Moddy, it's none of our business," I said, and he buttoned up.

Jeremy was right about Fenley not wanting to see us, though. He was busy with school work and grudged us the time, and when we got through telling him what'd happened at the pub, he just about exploded.

"You're intoxicated, the three of you!" he shouted. "You ought to be put away to sober up instead of disturbing an honest man's work with your hallucinations!"

"We're as sober as you are, Fenley," I said. "If you'd come out from under them big words and look at us, you'd see it."

"Well, you're not going into my field again!" he said. "You've had *something* to drink, and that's enough. Responsible people don't indulge at all. Now you take me. In all my life I haven't found it necessary to imbibe a single drop. And have *I* seen these crazy blue lights and heard this idiotic humming you talk about? I have not!"

"We won't hurt your precious field just walking through it," I said.

"You've already walked through it, and that's that!"

"We got to find this vehicle, Fenley," I said, but Jeremy Bliss gave me a look and I shut up.

"It'll be near to the full o' the moon tonight," Jeremy said, as we drove home, "and he's taking Margaret to a do at the school. A play or something like that. We'll have our look at his field, all right. Just be patient."

What we did, we stole up to the schoolmaster's place on foot and waited for him to drive off in his car. That was about eight o'clock. Then we went to the field and got in a line, holding hands, and walked up and down to cover every inch of it.

There were four of us. Bessie wouldn't come—she wasn't going to break the law for any queer foreigners, she said; let 'em mind their own business and she'd mind hers. And Margaret was at the school with Fenley, so there was just me and Moddy and Arthur Pottle and Jeremy Bliss.

It took us a long time to walk that big field, I can tell you. And what did we find for our trouble? Nothing. We didn't hope to see anything, mind you—just to walk into it and feel it. But if anything was there, it was so small we walked right over it or past it.

"'Course," Moddy said, "they might've moved it. I mean after they landed here, they might've run it off into the woods. We'd never find anything invisible in those woods."

"Or it could be sort of floating, the same as they do," Jeremy said. "Up there off the ground a bit maybe, just out of reach. We might've walked under it."

"Anyway," I said, "we're finished and that's a fact. Nobody's going to believe us without we have proof, so we'd best forget the whole thing."

But I'd reckoned without the strangers. Those things were watching all of us all the time, and inside of a week the whole village was talking about it. In our homes, in the shops, on the road—everywhere we went they were watching. We could feel it.

"We got to hold a meeting," Bessie Barnett said. "We got to decide what to do." It ought to be at my house on Saturday, she said, because mine was handiest. "I'll put up a notice in the pub," she said.

Just about everybody came. Everybody but Fenley Thompson, that is. We didn't expect him to know about any notice in the pub, of course, or to come on account of it, if he did know. Nor was it likely, living out so far, he'd felt the strangers watching the way we had.

But we had a crowd, I can tell you. By the time we were

ready to talk, it was so big we had to move out of the house into the yard.

I put a good sturdy table out there under my oak tree, and we got up on to it, one after another, to tell what we knew. First there was me and Arthur Pottle and Moddy Williams and Margaret, telling how we'd heard the vehicle that first night. Then Bessie Barnett and young Jeremy Bliss, telling what happened at the pub. Then a lot of others, one by one, telling how they'd heard humming sounds at this time or that, or felt they were being watched.

Finally I got up on the table again to give a brief summing-up.

"What it seems to amount to is this," I said. "These strangers don't mean us no real harm—they told us so in the pub—but they want one of us to go back with 'em. What they're hanging around for is to learn our language so they can talk one of us into it. They've got this vehicle hid somewhere, either in the woods or floating there over Fenley Thompson's field and—"

Just then Fenley Thompson pushed through the crowd and said in a thundering voice, "There is absolutely nothing floating over my field, and you know it! Stop talking this incredible nonsense!"

"How do we know it?" I said, when I'd got over the shock of seeing him there.

"Because it would cast a shadow in the moonlight, of course!" he said.

"Not if it was transparent, it wouldn't," Jeremy Bliss chimed up. "The light would go right through it. Them little blue things in the pub didn't cast no shadows on the ceiling, that I noticed."

Fenley Thompson got mad then. He was the schoolmaster, and no simple carpenter boy like Jeremy was going to talk to him that way in front of the whole village. "Stand aside, sir," he said, and climbed up on the table. "Now you listen to what I say, all of you!" he shouted, standing up there stiff as a post and belittling the lot of us with a grand look of contempt. "You listen and pay attention to words of wisdom, and then you'll go home and forget this idiocy!

"What you are suffering from at this moment is hysteria," Fenley said. "That's the name of it: mass hysteria. And the reason you are caught up in it is because you're all of a kind, all ignorant and foolish, and when I say that, I don't make any exceptions."

"That's a fine way to talk about your own fiancée," Jeremy Bliss yelled back at him.

"Hold your tongue!" Fenley shouted. "I speak only the truth, and you know it. Mass hysteria, that's what it is. Sheer idiocy born of ignorance. Now then, take me. Take *me*, I said. None of this can touch me because I—"

Well, it was a good thing, I guess. They were bound to take someone sooner or later, and nobody could have been less missed. And you've got to admit he asked for it. Spouting all those schoolmaster's words, getting the creatures all mixed up with stuff they never heard before—when he thundered two simple words like "Take me," what else did he expect?

Anyway, before you could even be sure it happened, Fenley Thompson was just a shimmering bit of blue light, there one second and gone the next.

"You might say he volunteered," Moddy Williams said, shaking his head. "Yes, sir, that's what he did, he volunteered. But I don't think he meant to."

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WILLIAM SANSOM

NO SMOKING ON THE APRON

An ironic story by a superb writer who specialises in making little people seem big

AIRSOCKS blew out taut as signposts; the apron stretched wide with wind, a long flat fen of tar and concrete and grass. But Dunko Bates waited windless with a dozen other passengers at the glass door still officially closed, but through which he would in a minute leave for the skies, London and home.

Pigskin about. Glossy little luggages in passengers' hands, and parcels and cartons. These who were spending half a hundred pounds on their tickets, were saving half a whole pound on little bottles of duty-free alcohol. And in stomachs there wobbled and gurgled unaccustomed drinks taken to while away the vestibular half-hours of air-travel, and odd bits of salacious food too—yet all soon to be followed by lunch at ten-thirty, and so on; Dunko Bates knew it all, the weird palliatives to this long day of quick communication. And a glucose sweet in the middle-oh.

Dull, all of it. But he felt now a little excited, or edgy, about this woman in white who stood to his left and slightly behind him. She was not pretty, but very attractive. She was smart, and smelled smart: coloured hair and face, scent, silk, and soft leather, sparkled out messages from her. She stood armoured and sure, like an actress, and dabbled last lipstick on her lips.

Bates smelled her, dismissed her —for what had he, well-married, to do with painted ladies in airplanes? —and watched a fat silver jet-liner amble about with a blind look, with

the blind purpose of a large expectant metal moth looking for somewhere to lay her eggs. Another plane was whining high, a celestial Hoover off-stage. And up swooped yet another low off the ground, too low it looked—would it ever gain healthy height?

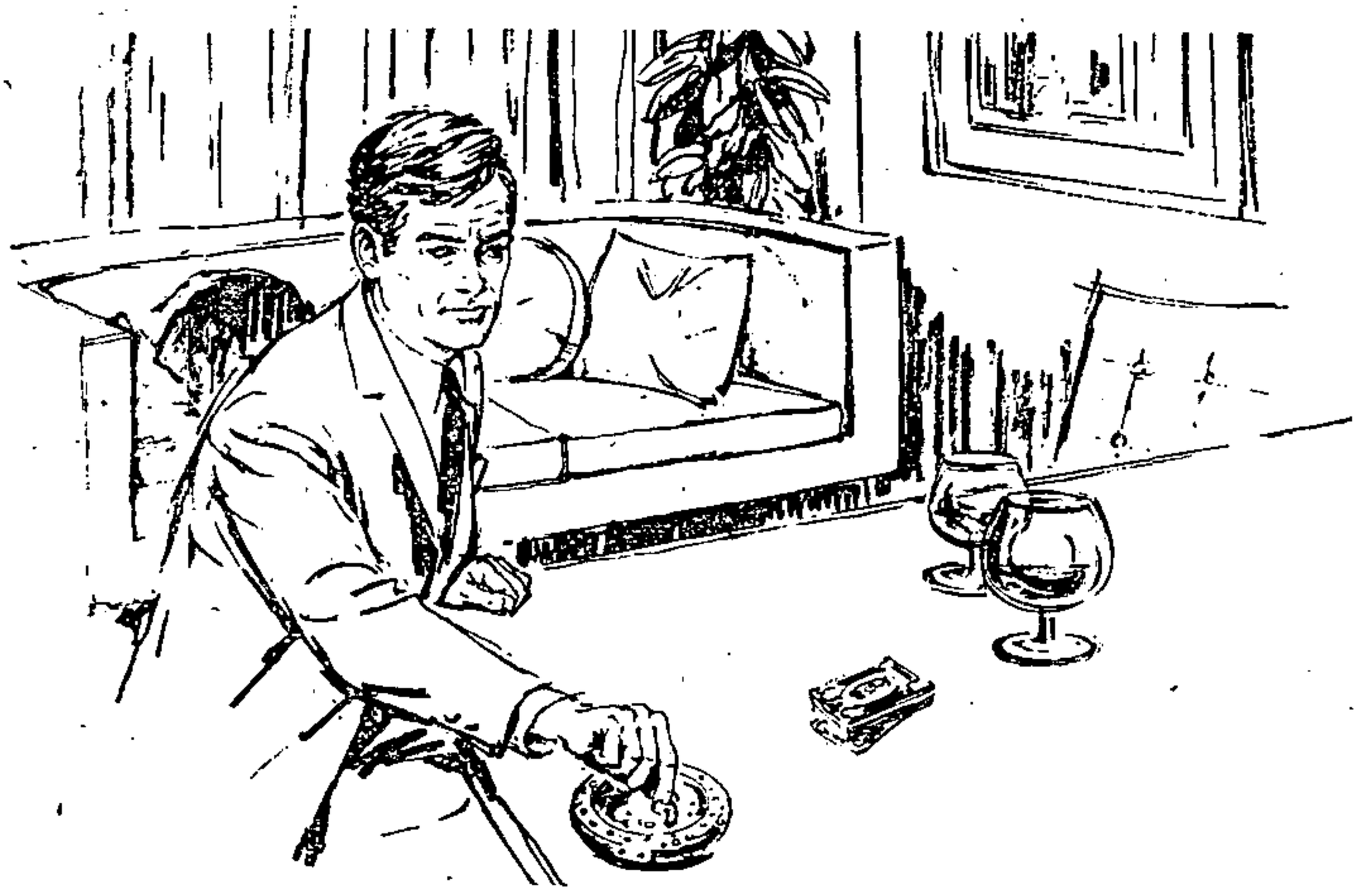
It would. But there again Dunko knew all about that, the queasy moment of taking off, the too nonchalant glance down to see that the trees and roofs had really got small enough, the sudden taste of the glucose sweet again, the relief heaved. And he remembered his telegram that morning to his wife: *Hope arrive sometime this afternoon.* His conference had ended early, he had been suddenly free of Copenhagen, and had chanced his single luck on the first available plane. And there it was again—he had superstitiously to swallow the thought *chance* my *luck* on *a plane*, just as earlier he had nearly cancelled the phrase *hope* arrive.

Whatever the statistics said about fewer accidents by plane than by any other form of transport, the whole horrible business still turned him up. Boasting aloud to people, "I'm dead scared of the whole business," did no good either. Every time he went up, until he was right up, he walked out on the apron as with a halter round his neck—fatal, surrendered, ticketed, docketed and doomed. The other passengers were no help—they easily assumed the appearance of insentient cattle herded witless to their fate. And the fixed knowing smiles of the hostess and steward were false as a nurse's death-cheer.

The woman in white did not seem so troubled. She was still working away with the lipstick, sucking her lips in, legs braced firmly back on high heels. He went once more over his preparations; passport, ticket, briefcase, bag, flight docket—and then remembered his fountain pen. It always leaked under height-pressure. He looked at the floor. No carpet. A drop of ink wouldn't harm?

He took the pen out and uncapped it. But just as he pressed the lever, the door to the field was swung open, a great gust of Baltic air blew in, the spitting ink was caught in mid-drop and blown sideways to splatter a rich blue tattoo all over that woman's white dress.

"Aaah," she gasped. Her fine shoulders squared: "You—you great—clumsy—idiot," she gasped. "You idiotic *fool.*" At the same time she raised her hand to mark her point, jabbing him with it as she repeated, "You'll pay, pay, *pay* for this . . ." And she repeated it and it was the hand that held the lipstick that jabbed him, all over his lapels, his shirt,



and as high as his collar as her face reached up close to his.

"Aaah," she sighed, at last receding, while he stammered apologies.

Then: "I say," he said, "I mean, really," as he looked down at his shirt and suit now daubed with red.

So there they stood, panting for breath and words, the two of them red, white and blue as a drunkard's eye.

But just then the door was officially opened, an official chanted once again the flight number and beckoned them out to the apron, and there they had to go.

As they walked out, quickly—for each passenger must hurry, though without seeming to, without running, to be first for the best place in the plane—the woman snapped at him: "What's your name and address?"

Grimly he swung his briefcase and bag into one hand, fumbled in his waistcoat and gave her a card. Like a dueller, she whipped into her bag and gave him hers.

By that time, they had reached the stairway into the plane. Tow-haired men made of pork and beer stood underneath, tending long pipes fixed into the aircraft's belly: like flaxen farmers, they seemed to be mechanically milking this fine, fat, silver aphis. As he stepped aside to let the woman walk up the stairs first, Dunko noted with pleasure the goose-pimpling of rivets that studded the machine's silver body all over, so very many, so secure.

There were few passengers. Dunko and the woman each had a double seat to their separate selves. She sat just behind the starboard wing, he a little farther back to port.

Ordinarily, now, Dunko would have glanced up at the little lighted words telling him not to smoke and to get ready for the crash by fastening his seat-belt—followed by the reassurance of the captain's name written up in solid letters, a trick that really worked, because, thus named, this man must bear all responsibility for any mishandling. And he would have looked out along the wing to make sure nothing was falling off. And he would have caught sight of the airport building, suddenly now a dull contemptible place full of landlubbers eating and drinking. But today all these routines—and the quick look through the pamphlets and sickness bag in the web pocket in front—all were purged by new anxieties. For, of course, the woman was quite right to flare at him so. Yes, yes, quite right—though it had been an accident. Nevertheless . . . what would such a dress cost? Would he have to buy her another? Where? Paris? He tried desperately to subdue his sense of fair play and find a way out. But there was none evident.

Then he remembered something else. There was this lipstick all over him . . . and what kind of a reception might he thus receive from his dearly loved at home? On the threshold, between twin-tubbed baytrees in the light of an electrified carriage lamp, at the primrose door? Slashed with rouge? He would never be able to blame his wife for what she might think. So there he sat, not blaming two women; and the plane slightly shuddered as it slid smoothly off towards the runway.

The uneasy thought of a hundred pounds for a dress had to be put aside in consideration of a greater loss, that of his wife. Yet wives and husbands, assumably in each other's confidence, should surely be able to discuss so absurd a story, and to laugh about it? But was there not a too-privately-amused twist to his wife's lips as he stammered through the whole ridiculous rigmarole, and a certain half-light of fear in her eyes afterwards, when hollowly they had laughed together about the whole thing? And in any case, surely the episode was a trifle *too* ridiculous to be quite believed? Damn life, he thought, that is made up so much of these trip-rope absurdities, rather than seriously heroic traps. Why couldn't he, just for once, be permitted to save someone from drowning? Where were the runaway horses at whose heads to throw himself? Life the bloody banana-skin, he thought.

The captain was turning the plane around, and as at other times Dunko might have looked up at the little red emergency-door notices, he now went through all possible routes from

this far more frightening problem. It was a Sunday, so he could not buy a new shirt. Wait—what about the East End, Petticoat Lane? No, shut by the afternoon. Bitterly he cursed the drip-dry age that sent him abroad with only one shirt and a footling plastic hanger. Then, could he perhaps bribe a shirt from someone? He foresaw the affronted surprise at such effrontery, the long explanations. It made him tired to think of it. Impossible. Well then, a hotel showcase? But on a Sunday afternoon no-one would have the key, and there would surely be some Act forbidding a Sunday sale. Moreover, there would be no shirts in the cases of any hotels *he* chose—there would be only ties, and socks, and diamonds; everything but shirts. To think, ten years ago, of all the bachelor friends he could easily have telephoned! Now not one left, all married up. In any case, even if a sabbatical London in some fantastic fashion were made to yield up a shirt, it would be too much to ask a suit of it: and his, pale grey, was indelibly daubed with red.

Then, as at last he surrendered to his predicament, a dark thought came to him. He did not admit it; but nevertheless it propelled him. He rose up, crossed the carpeted gangway, and sat down beside that woman in white.

"Now we're more settled," said Dunko, "I'd like to say how very sorry I am about your dress. I really am. It was," he said, "a most unfortunate incident—accident."

It was only good manners, he repeated to himself—still draping his unadmitted intention with this excuse of apologising to a lady. Yet what was he doing with his face—flashing his eyes, glittering his teeth, revving up a kind of charm-engine inside him?

"We're on fire," she said.

Who? Him?

"There!" she gasped, grabbing his arm and pointing out along the wing. A tongue of flame was spitting from behind one of the engines.

His heart jumped. He never liked the look of that. But he had seen it often before, and now laughed reassurance at the woman. "Not to worry," he said, "it's only—" but he never quite knew what it was—"overflow petrol burning off," he guessed.

She now smiled. "I'm sorry," she said, "silly of me."

"No, it's I who am sorry. And silly. Won't you have a drink?"

"Well, I don't—"

"Good," he said, and rang the steward's bell.

By the time they had each drunk a double Schnaps—after her protestations against such early spirits, and his overruling that lunch would be served unearthly, ha ha literally unearthly, soon, and he was ringing the bell for more—they had ceased to discuss the incident of the ink and were talking enjoyably of other things.

The plane was high in the skies. They had been too occupied to notice much the differing roars and whines of the engine: only once, at the vital moment of leaving the ground, Dunko had halted in mid-sentence, observing a ritual silence, and a second later had glanced very casually through the porthole to make sure they had achieved a proper height. And the woman, ignorant of the meaning of this moment, more ready to fear changes of noise and lurchings, had asked him if he was all right? "Quite," he said.

She had laughed: "For a moment I thought you were going to be sick."

So it was as apparent as that? "Never sick," he said, "the sick bags are too valuable. I'm making a little collection of them. My favourites are the Swedish FOR SYK, and the remarkably suggestive Portuguese—PARA ENJOO."

"Suggestive?"

"Sort of enjoyment and goo, with a parachute thrown in for good measure. *Have a nice time while you're at it.*"

Luckily, she leered at this. But what was he up to—getting on to goo when he had meant to be at his most charming? Charming—for what had passed through Dunko's mind earlier was to be hanged for a sheep as well as a lamb. Thus, if his loved one at home was going to accuse him of sexual infidelity, then sexually infidel he might as well be. It was the injustice of it all that impelled him. He had managed to conceive and to fortify a picture of his wife's scowling face, quite unjustly. Well—if Sheila wanted to take *that* sort of attitude, if she refused outright even to try to understand his position—then at least he would get his money's worth, he would go ahead and flirt fit to bust with this woman in white.

"I travel a lot," he said, "on business."

"What are you in?"

"Shrimps—that is, frozen shellfish."

"Mm! Num."

"You like them? Then I must certainly send you some—remember, I've got your card, Miss—" he looked at it, "oh, *Mrs.* Cabot."

"Just a wife."

"Just?"

"A wife with ten days in Denmark behind her. An uneventful ten days," she murmured, frowning, and smiling to herself.

"Why uneventful?"

He looked out at the wing flapping rubbery, and again applauded the amount of rivets, the silver cleanliness—and looked back at her, pleased with her strong pleasant face, firm-chinned, and softened by dark blue eyes brightened by black lashes. She wore a very white powder, under a very black fringe. And the red lipstick, the whiteness of face and dress and the blue eyes—and, come to that, the spattering of his own blue ink, gave her something of the look of a large child in party dress—white, red and blue: or one of those old-style Gallic prostitutes who wore the tricolour ribbon in black hair above their white shifts, and a tricolour garter on black stockings. It was, he supposed, the dark fringe that emphasised these effects. But surely she could not be English?

"Is England your home now?" he asked.

"Why uneventful?" she said, still considering his question. "Why, I've never been able to get over that adolescent expectation that something should *happen* on a trip abroad. You know?"

"I think I do," he murmured. Abroad. She spoke English perfectly.

"Oh yes I'm English," she added—and this was wonderful, how their thoughts were meeting!—"always lived there. Though I've a Belgian mother."

So it took no more than a Belgian mother to do all this? He marvelled. And thrilled.

"But this time nothing, nothing, nothing happened," she said, and shot him a dark amused glint from her blue-black inky eyes.

He returned her a knowing look; the plane thrummed, the sun now shone in, holiday-hot above a far-reaching cotton sea of cloud, and lunch was served.

A while later, after they had fiddled with a dwarf's set of small square dishes and pixie pepperpots, he presented her with his foil-wrapped triangle of processed cheese. She accepted. He assured her he had eaten enough, and surely the triangle should not be left to the profit of the air company? It was all rather exciting, intimate—sharing food, like tried lovers eating from the same plate.

"I don't like flying," he said, over a goblin's tumbler of brandy, "but I shall never cease to marvel at our being suspended in air in such a heavy intricate machine full of carpets and lavatories. If you could put your finger out through the window, it would be blasted off by frost alone. Yet here we sit snuggly and warm. Control of the skies! You've got to hand it to man."

Snuggly was good. They two together snuggly.

"Ah," she said, "if only man would learn to control himself as well."

They two together, deeply philosophic! But having sighed profoundly, he turned her last remark. Deftly.

"It's sometimes too difficult for him," he murmured, looking straight into her eyes: which, after a lost second, she lowered modestly.

"We're approaching a small patch of bad weather," said the captain's disembodied voice, "it will be more comfortable if everyone would please fasten their seat-belts."

Instant hush. Then a rise of chatter as everybody flinched or boasted. Let's hope man controls himself now, Dunko thought, as he smiled reassuringly at Mrs. Cabot—who had gone a shade whiter than usual. "Nothing untoward," he told her, with his big lazy smile. Alone, he would have felt apprehensive. But now, great protective muscles bunched all over him, he felt athletically capable of dealing with any terror, now that this more frightened person was by his side.

"How on earth does he know?" she asked, looking out at the clear blue sky and the cloud below.

"Wireless telegraphy," he said casually.

Why not "radio"? But then radio was a brittle word, it sounded too much like a modern air-crash headlined by efficient newspapers. Whereas the other suggested old leather and vulcanite contraptions—crystal sets that battled like good camping equipment, bending with the elements, elastic, true.

Then the windows all turned black as night, the plane took a terrible plunge, banged down on a floor of something, shook to burst, and then raced its engines as if climbing a hill.

She was digging her fingers into his wrist. Big-muscled still, but the blood drained from his gills, he put his other hand over hers, hairy and comforting. When the next lurch came, she buried her face between his lapel and armpit: powder, and more rouge, sunk into his suit.

He felt genuinely tender then towards her, and braver in himself. As a virtue of sin is to provoke virtue in others, so

fear in others has made many a coward a brave man—this infection of opposites brought the blood back to Dunko's cheeks and he was able to mutter warmly, without a tremor: "Not to worry. All quite usual. A bit of an electric storm."

The plane took a terrible lurch to one side, then rose, racing again, then dropped flat as a runaway lift—everyone rose in their seats, a briefcase flew through the air, cups clattered horribly, blackness flew by the portholes, and the pilot began zooming this way and that like a hook-mad barracuda weaving fast through ink-dark deep water.

"Quite usual," Dunko said, and stroked her hair.

They reared and plunged on. A woman was quietly sobbing somewhere, a man was ringing the bell over-jovially for a brandy "to top up," the hostess was flitting to and fro along the carpeted gangway with a set toothpaste smile plastered where her mouth should have been. Dunko glanced at her eyes for signs of fear, but, as always, they bore no expression at all.

There was something appalling about the electric lights still blazing all over what now felt a very small cigar-shaped roomlet, a miniature tube train run wild in a tunnel. Yet how much worse if all these lights had gone out! Dunko massaged his Mrs. Cabot and glanced efficiently up at the red-marked emergency exit opposite the next seat along—but how in the devil to open it? Push what? And how to get round in front of two people sitting there? What did one do—stiffen the upper lip and queue?

"There!" he said, as they zoomed out into pure blue daylight.

"Oh God," she said, straightening herself up and withdrawing her hand quite sharply.

She was offended with him for having been there to witness her lack of control. But this passed; the stronger fact of bodily contact, the intimacy of airplanes, the escapade of voyage—for in its condensed way, a plane-trip had the liberalising effect on the romantic strings of a sea-voyage—these brought them closer together, so that soon their knees were touching and he was murmuring without shame such sweet everythings as "your lapis lazuli eyes." Flirting had given way to something far fleshier; and Dunko had quite forgotten his earlier reservations, as success took its exhilarating toll.

"I'm so glad we caught fire," he chuckled.

"What? We *didn't*!"

"I mean, when we began, remember? Along the wing? Otherwise you'd still have been at me over your dress—confess!"

She laughed. "Oh that," she said, ink-blue eyes lowered on to ink-stains.

"Where did you get it?" he asked. "It looks so marvellous!"

Flattered, and proud of her own clever buy, she said: "A little place round the corner—two pounds, seventeen and six!"

"Good heavens!" he said, really pleased for her. An hour earlier he would have felt relief: but now such a matter, the debt or no of a hundred pounds, was lost in the blood rush. And the air dashed by as their great silver cigar crossed high above more and more sea rippling tiny below, far-below skin wrinkled on a grey old hand, with lost ships like scattered moles—to England, home and London Airport.

But when she went to wash her hands, he was left for a moment with thoughts of his true predicament, and of his wife; and his stomach felt guiltily empty. Then she was back, there and lovely in the flesh, and he felt hot and handsome as before. But the guilty memory of Sheila dovetailing into Mrs. Cabot made him notice that they were both of the same colouring—two editions as it were of the same thing, and he felt both more betraying and somehow faithful at the same time.

By the time the captain was telling them they were passing over the English coast and on time, Dunko and Mrs. Cabot knew a superficial lot about each other, where they lived and what they liked. She did not comment on her husband, she simply kept off the subject. So did he.

But she lived in Cumberland, and had to spend the night in London . . .

They peered down at the very green plan of London beneath—it seemed to be a clean and fresh-built garden city—and then the no-smoking sign lit up, the seat-belts went on, and the runway came up to meet them. As always, Dunko averted his eyes from this. And this time he used the occasion to stare long and fixedly into hers. Then—*bumpety-bump* went the wonderful rubber wheels, they whizzed smooth along, and the engines at last reversed. It was the moment of safety. "Ah," he said, with a look of pleasure. She took this to mean relief at a journey, their journey together, ended—and such a small sign of his interest ending helped to

accelerate in her an idle thought, a wish, an idea. The idea became, vaguely, a decision.

Landings, arrivals . . . no night richness of a city of red and yellow jewels beneath, no mystery of blue lamps studding like magic marsh-gas the barren flat dark field—no, here was simply London air in daylight, stale inland air after the salt breezes of Denmark. In the aircraft they shuffled up among coats and hangers in the thick silence left by the engine's last pop. They endured the frank-eyed goodbyes of the hostess and steward, so intendedly personal as to end up precisely inhuman; stepped down the stairs, marvelling again at the size of the now-so-quiet big beast that had carried them so far—it was neither sweating, nor puffing—and walked together among other passengers clutching their duty-free packages towards the big solid brick airport building. Isolated on the broad field, the trailing little group wound like a lonely funeral party escaping from its own coffin.

"Within walking distance!" he found himself saying. "Lucky we didn't have to get one of those awful tarmac buses. They're awful, those awful buses, after you've come so far so quick."

She touched his arm tenderly and smiled her strong smile.

"Are you taking the other bus, up to the terminal?" she asked. He nodded, as she continued: "My hotel's just by the terminal. I'll make a bargain; if you taxi me there, I'll give you a drink. Fair?" she proposed brightly, as with good clean fun.

As she said this, he saw across her shoulder a big notice: NO SMOKING ON THE APRON.

"Fair?" he laughed. "It's dyed-in-the-wool blonde. Let's wash it in beer!"

Phew! And with that notice rumbling at him! And what if the apron smokes on *you*, Dunko-boy?

And in the arrival lounge, and up against the quiet grey-eyed passport officer in his misleading tweeds, and with the sharply polite customs men in their peaked caps, he again saw the writing on the wall: DUNKO GO HOME.

She had put more of that scent on. She felt to him, on this firm dull unmoving earth, more attractive than ever—and she moved so well, that had been the first thing he had noticed back at the other airport.

It was still early in the day. There was the whole afternoon. The two usual sensations of the arrived fought inside him—that he must hurry, hurry home now by this slow-bus-and

taxi business after the wind-whistling aircraft: and the opposite—that here was *terra firma* upon which you could spread yourself, stroll across to buy a paper, with all time hanging about slow as fog after the fleet minutes of aluminium flight. Along with these immediate sensations, his real responsible and equally real delinquent sides fought for place. After all—it was only for a drink? And time did not press?

So he stood at the terminal, fiddling. Fiddling in his mind: and his pockets too. Should one throw what ticket, what label away? Airplanes left one's pockets full of paper. He stood fiddling, and meanwhile two taxis had drawn up. Not asking, the porter put both their luggages into the first taxi, and she said: "Gaylor's Hotel, off the Cromwell Road there," so that who could blame him for not expostulating, rearranging, goodbyeing—and with the queue behind for other taxis? Who? He well knew who.

But now also the body came to help these mental worries, it said he wanted a drink and—as this very thought rose to mind, conscious and alert, Dunko squeezed her knee in the cab jerking and buzzing not at all slowly towards Gaylor's.

He went to choose a table for them in the lounge while she signed the register. But she interrupted, looked round the big room with a *brrr* sound and a shiver, and bade him come up to her room, for she must in any case unpack a few dresses immediately. "I *have* others, in reserve," she smiled.

Up in her room, as she walked about active and decided, placing her handbag there and parcels here, and ordering the drinks which came almost immediately, Dunko did not know whether to stand or to sit and if sit, to sit on what. So he went to the mirror, and combed his hair with his fingers.

"Drink!" she said, handing him a glass. "There's more on the tray—I'll only be two ticks in the bathroom, get this blotter of yours off my back."

But she came back not in another dress but a *peignoir*.

They drank. Then, having so far fixed the material scene, she advanced no further. Swept off his feet by so sudden and apparently brazen a succession of events—taxi, lift, shut door, drinks, *peignoir*—he found himself expected to put his best foot forward.

Daylight came grey through the window, but golden whisky made night light inside him. And all around was the excitation of unfamiliar feminine scents and objects—she had already emptied a leather case of cosmetics and bottles out on to the dressing table. All this made for terrible silences. Once they

both started talking together; and broke with laughter at this. The laughter was too loud, hysterical, and only emphasised the next patch of silence.

He looked at her, and felt suddenly sad. It seemed both exciting and pathetic. Rooms, rooms, men and women everywhere, all doing the same kind of thing. Each unique, each the same.

"Blast," he gasped, and took her in his arms and kissed her for a long dark time. "No," she groaned, "no," and drew him closer. The *peignoir* slid apart and they lay back on the bed and made love, while occasionally voices passed muffled in the corridor outside and a sound of plates washing echoed up from the kitchens far below the window, and the sun far above in the sky wheeled lower and lower until, just before its landing, it shone low through the window and turned the wallpaper to dying, dead gold.

He got up and opened his own flask of duty-free whisky and poured two drinks. They sat on the edge of the bed and drank, talking a little too brightly, laughing, but kissing no more. They both felt sad, and the room seemed strangely empty.

A little later, he said goodbye. They still had each other's cards, and said so in mutual consolation, but the duel was plainly over.

He was home.

She ran to him, all brightness like a big little dog, and hugged and hugged him, kissed and kissed, snuggling and snuffling, stroking his chest with her soft cheek.

"Oh darling, darling, darling!"

And then: "Oh *darling* what a *filthy* mess I've made of you—your shirt—your *suit*. Oh, Dunk, what a *beast* I am . . ."

© William Sansom 1962

◆ William Sansom, successful writer of short stories, novels and film-scripts, didn't make writing a full-time career until he was almost thirty. Until then he had led a varied life, with jobs ranging from playing the piano in a dance band to working in a bank. Today he lives with his wife in a quiet part of St. John's Wood, writing his lively but often disturbing stories and dreaming about his ambition to write operetta

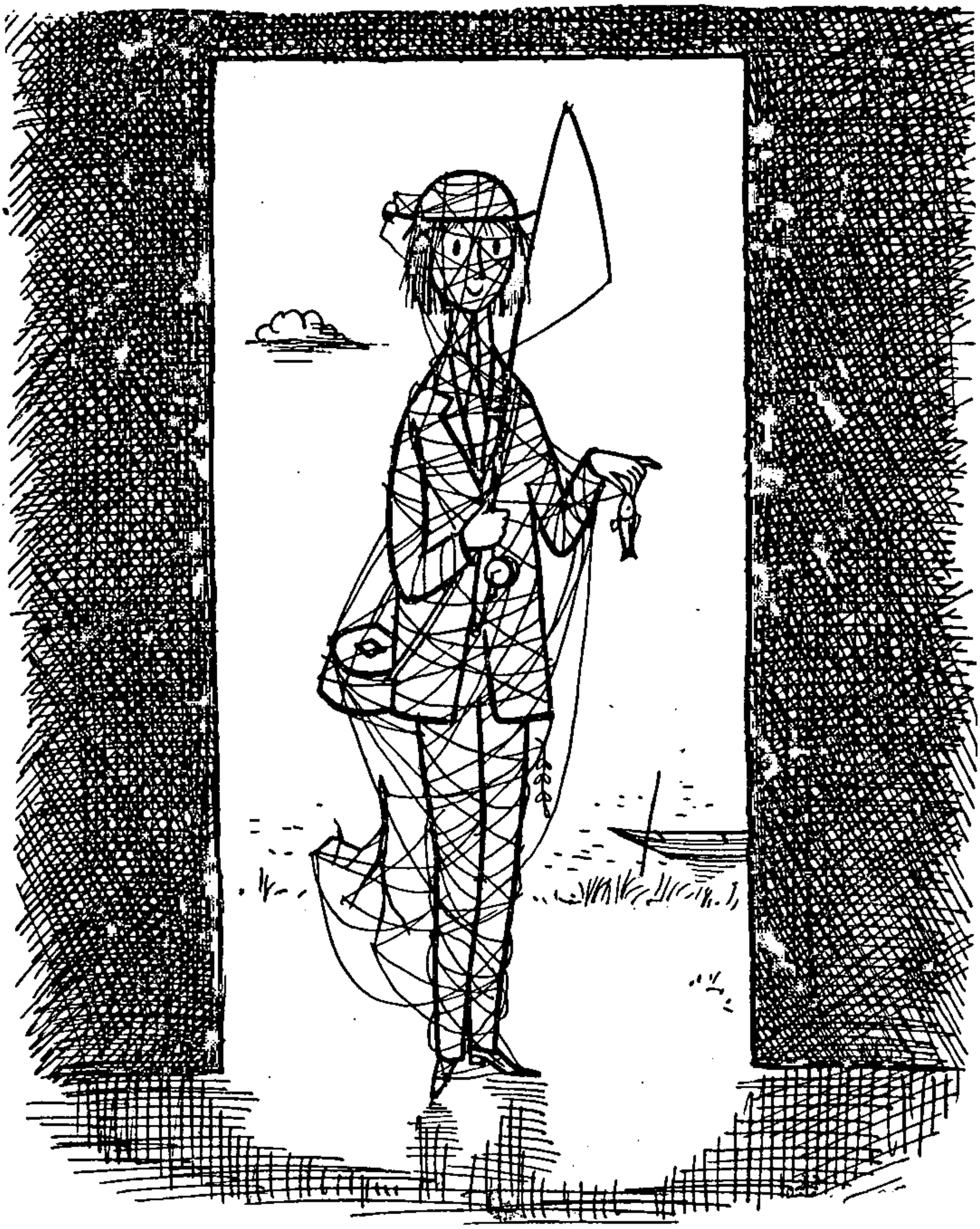
" Pass me my pyjamas, dearest."

To brighten your turn-of-the-year blues, take Argosy's escape route with Raymond Peynet, who created those sugary-spicy Lovers . . .

" I'm the new mer maid, sir."

MORE OF

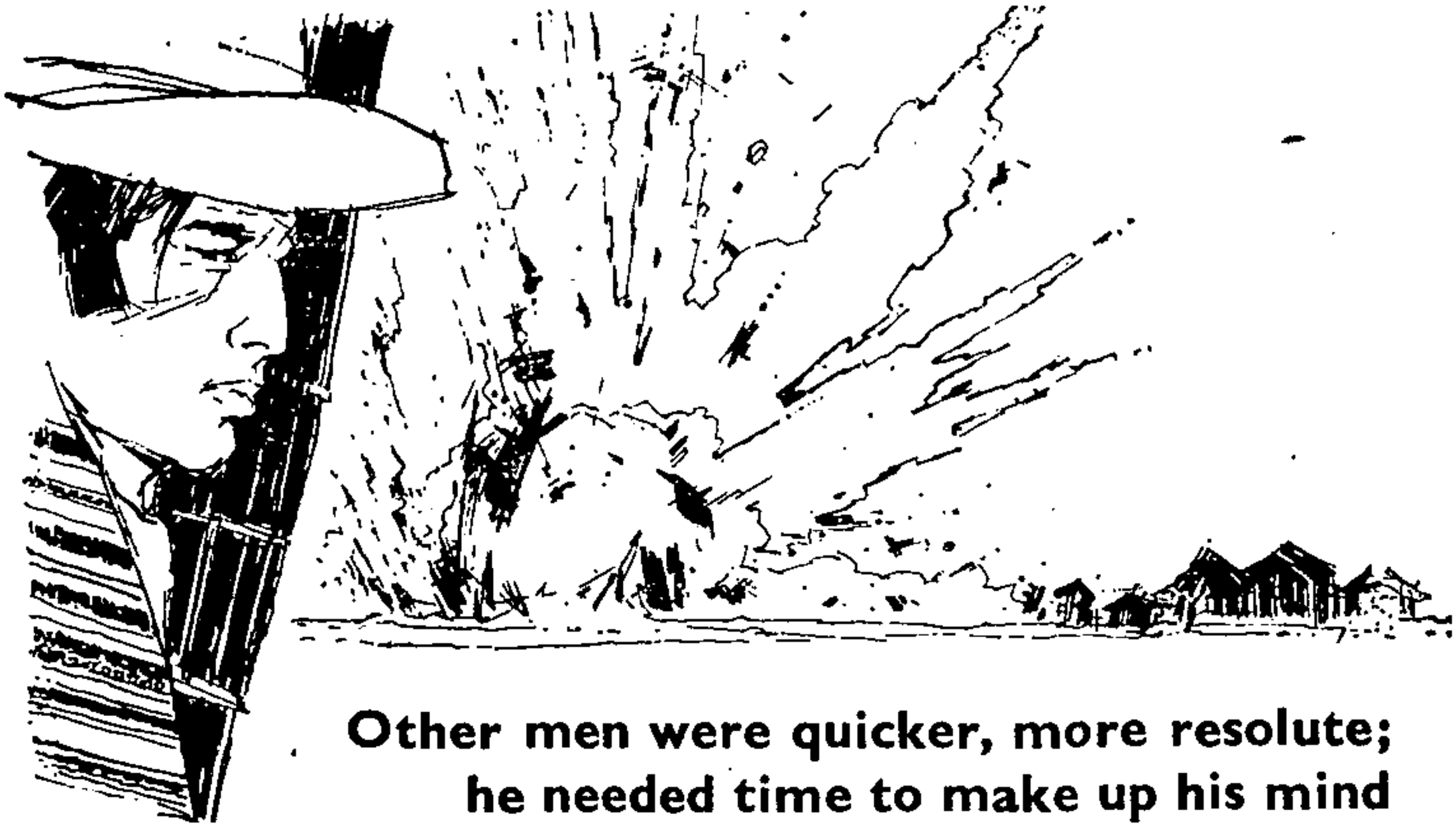
Bairnet



" It fought like a lion . . . "

RAYMOND PEYNET was born in Paris. His first cartoon was published when he was 22 and, since then, his cartoons and drawings have graced an impressive list of international publications. He is married to the original and only "Elle"—Denise, an art student; they have lived happily ever after, with their daughter, in a flat in Paris and a château in the south of France

"Sorry you've been bubbled."



Other men were quicker, more resolute; he needed time to make up his mind

THE Indian peasant, Eliseo Gallardo, had three pretty daughters of marriageable age, the eldest sixteen, the youngest thirteen years old.

One day there came to see him Natalio Salvatorres, also Indian, who for several weeks had worked in the bush burning charcoal for about fifty *pesos*. After he had bought himself a new cotton shirt, cotton pants, a new bast hat and also, honest boarder that he was, paid his bill, little was left of the money.

Saturday last there had been a dance at the village until near sunrise. At this dance Natalio had seen the three Gallardo girls, but rarely only had he a chance to dance with them because the other young men had always been quicker and more resolute than he who needed time to make up his mind.

All Sunday he was thinking things over. It took him Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday to get better acquainted with his freshly hatched idea. By Friday he knew clearly what he wanted. It was this idea which made him go, on Saturday, to see Eliseo.

"Well, which of the three do you want?" Eliseo asked.

"That one." With a move of his thick-haired head he pointed towards Sabina who was fourteen and had the prettiest front.

"That's what I thought." Eliseo nodded. "Sure, she'd taste you very fine. You're not so dumb. By the way, what's your distinguished name?"

LOVE JUSTICE AND A BOMB

BY B. TRAVEN

After Natalio had given his full name which he could pronounce but not write or spell, the father asked him how much money he possessed.

"Twenty *pesos*." It was double the amount he really owned.

"Then you cannot have Sabina. I need a pair of new pants, and the old woman has got no shoes of any kind. If you wish to go that splendid and ask for Sabina you can't expect us to run about in dirty rags. What do you think our standing is in this village? New pants for me and at least one pair of white or brown canvas shoes for the woman. Otherwise there is no opening for you in our family. Let me have some of your tobacco."

The cigarettes rolled and lit, Natalio said, "*Bueno*, Don Eliseo, I'll be satisfied just as fine with that one over there." This time he made a gesture towards Filomena, the eldest of the three.

"*Muy listo*, Natalio, you're smart, that's what I say. Where're you working?"

"I own a *burro*, a good young and strong donkey it is, I'm sure."

"No horse?"

These questions concerning his financial situation made Natalio quite uneasy. He spat several times upon the earthen floor of the hut before he spoke again.

"I've got also an uncle who works in a mine up there near Parral where there are a hundred mines and more.

Soon as I've got a woman I'll be on my way and wait there until I can work in the mine. My uncle will see to that; he knows the foreman with whom he is very chummy and who's kind of a friend of his. And what do you think, Don Eliseo, one can easily make three *pesos* a day in those mines."

"Three *pesos* a day is good money I should say. It's a lot of money if you ask one who knows money. Anyhow, the lousy twenty *pesos* you've got right now isn't much to boast of. With that little cash we can't make a wedding."

"Why not?" Natalio asked. "A wedding can't cost that much money. A minister? Well, we surely can't pay him. So we'll have to do without the help of the church. And then another thing—we can't pay for the marriage licence either, can we?"

"Right you are, Natalio. There isn't that much money in the whole world to pay for such things which have little to do with a wedding anyway. Of course, we must have at least two musicians for the dance. Then we must have three bottles, or better still four bottles, of *mezcal*. Otherwise the people here in the village might gossip about us and say that Filomena was not married to you at all and only had run away with you like a hussy. I tell you, *muchacho*, my boy, such things are not done with us. Not with my daughters, no *señor*. We are honest folks. Don't you ever try to wait for one of my daughters to run away with you without my special permission. You might as well wait a thousand years for such a dirty thing to happen in my family, not with me as the father around. No, *señor*, not with us."

So the two men began to negotiate. After hours of talking and smoking and drinking several cups of coffee, specially made for the visitor, it was agreed upon that Natalio should go back to the bush for six or eight weeks more and produce a load of charcoal sufficient to pay for the musicians, for the *mezcal* or the brandy, two pounds of coffee, six pounds of brown sugar, one pair of light canvas shoes for the mother and one pair of pants for the father. Besides, there should be two *pesos'* worth of sweet bread to be eaten with the coffee by the women and children who would come to the wedding. In fact, the whole village would be at the wedding, and if a few *pesos* would still be left over for unexpected guests from a neighbouring village, so much the better for the good reputation of the family.

When, finally, the deal was closed, Natalio had accepted

all the conditions proposed by the father. He was to take up his quarters in one corner of the only room of which the simple adobe hut consisted: and since it could not be avoided anyway, Filomena was permitted to sleep in the same corner provided Natalio would buy her a new blanket.

He hurried right away to the nearest general store and bought a new blanket with the brightest colours he could find. He returned with a bottle of *mezcal* to celebrate the deal.

All members of the family, and naturally Filomena not excluded, had been present during the whole time while the two men were negotiating what to them was a straightforward business.

After everyone had taken his shot from the bottle, Filomena was asked by her father if she had something to say. "I'd very much like to go to Parral," that was all she answered.

So everybody was satisfied with the deal.

The wedding dance was over. Old man Gallardo had been stinking drunk. But drunk as he was, he took great concern not to get mud on his new yellow cotton pants. The old woman had worn her new brown canvas shoes qnly for the first hour of the party. Then she wrapped them up again in paper and put them back into the cardboard box in which they had been sold and, with the pride of being the owner of such a treasure, she had hidden them well away so that none of her daughters would find them.

As everything had taken place the way it had been planned beforehand, Filomena now was Natalio's *esposa,* respected by everybody as his wife whom nobody must covet or, worse than that, try to snatch away from him.

Natalio loaded two blankets, a coffee kettle, a frying pan, a small bast bag with his provisions, his machete, his axe, and his Filomena on his *burro* and went on his way to the Parral mines.

He had no uncle there. This had been one of his lies to win the confidence of Filomena's father. Nevertheless, as he was earnestly willing to work and to take on any job no matter how hard it might be, he was less than a week in the little mining village he had chosen, when he got work. It was not three *pesos* he made—of course, not—all he earned was one *peso* seventy-five a day, but any overtime counted extra and paid double.

During his spare time Natalio built a flimsy adobe hut

like all the others he saw in the village. Here he lived with his Filomena the life of the average Indian miner. She cooked his meals, did his laundry, patched up his pants, and warmed up his cot in the cold nights so frequent in those mountain regions.

He was very happy, Natalio was; and Filomena, obviously, had no cause for complaints . . .

For a whole lifetime this *status-quo* might have lasted had it not been for a young and fresh miner who discovered in Filomena something extra special—the sort of which Natalio would never have found in his wife even had he lived with her fifty years and a half. So it happened that when Natalio one night came home from work he met no wifey in his nest. As she had taken with her the brightly coloured blanket, the three muslin dresses, and her comb, all that he had bought her, he knew that she had gone for good and that she had no intention ever to return.

The way all the huts in which the miners live are built in such little villages in the mountains and the material of which they are made do not allow any secrets or much privacy under their roofs. And as these lightly-built huts have no windows, the doors are always kept open—closed only when the inhabitants retire for the night. So it was not hard for Natalio to find the hut he was looking for.

Through the walls of that particular hut, made of a light network of twigs and sticks against which mud was thrown, Natalio saw Filomena sitting happily at the side of her newly-elected. She and her new man, as Natalio could see clearly, were having a jolly good time such as he could not remember ever having had with her. She never had looked at him or caressed him the way she now treated her lover. Two more young couples were in the hut. All were laughing and talking and well keyed up. The name of Natalio was never mentioned once. He might as well have been dead for a long time the way these young people ignored his existence.

Once Natalio had convinced himself that Filomena appeared to be far happier and a hundred times more in love than she had ever been with him and that there was not a spark of hope whatever that she might think of returning to his side, he decided to bring this episode of his life to an end.

He went to the barn in which the tools and the explosives were stored. He crawled in under the walls of corrugated sheet iron and got out some dynamite and fuse. With the cunning and patience of which only an Indian out for his

revenge is capable, Natalio manufactured a bomb of which the visible part was an empty can of some preserved food picked up near the general store.

Having finished the bomb he returned to the hut where the three couples were still together and more animated and jollier than before. Filomena's lover played a mouth organ and she was cuddled up to him. By all appearances the three couples intended to stay all night and sleep there until the men had to go to work again in the morning.

It was easy for Natalio to throw the bomb through the open door into the hut after he had lit the fuse and seen to it that the fuse had taken.

This done he left the premises and went to his own abode to turn in. Whatever a man can do to make a bomb effective he had done and to his best ability. The result was of no special interest to him. Strange as this may seem, such is the way of these illiterate people. Should the bomb go off, as he was sure it would, everything would be all right. But should, on the other hand, and for some reason or other, the bomb refuse to explode, then all and everything would be all right just as well. After the bomb had been made and placed properly he considered his revenge fully completed. All that was to happen, apart from what he had done so far, this he left to providence. From now on and for all time to come Filomena and her new man would be safe from him. For him this case was closed for ever.

Yet not so for the three couples inside the hut.

In the mining districts every Indian—man or woman alike—knows what it means if he sees at his feet an old empty can of preserved food to which is attached a fuse which smokes.

The couples seeing the bomb, leapt frog-like out of the hut without even a yell of terror; this took them less than half a second. Immediately a terrific explosion followed which sent the hut two hundred feet high up into the air.

Filomena and her lover had received not even a scratch. The other members of the party were also unhurt save the young woman of the third couple, the one that owned the hut.

This unfortunate woman had, at the very moment the bomb appeared at the party, been busy making fresh coffee in the farthest corner of the hut. Therefore neither could she see the bomb nor note the rapid and speechless departure of her guests. Consequently, she accompanied the hut on its trip upwards. Since in so short a time she could not decide

quickly enough which part of the hut she would like best to travel with, she landed at twenty different places in the vicinity.

One week later, a police agent comes to the mine to see Natalio and to ask him what he might know about the explosion. While being questioned right where he works, in an open excavation, Natalio does not allow himself to be seriously interrupted in his work. Only when he is resting—to wipe off his sweat and roll himself a cigarette—does he honour the agent with the information wanted.

"You've thrown a bomb into the *choza* of Alejo Crespo, haven't you?"

"That's right. But it's none of your business. It's a purely domestic affair, it is."

"By this bomb a woman has been killed."

"I know it. No need to tell me. It is my woman and I think I can do with my woman whatever damn pleases me, for she gets from me her meals, and all her clothes, and the music for the wedding I've paid also. There are no debts left. Everything is paid."

Natalio knows what he is talking about. There is no nonsense in what he says. And he knows that he is telling the truth.

"Only the trouble is," the agent goes on, "it wasn't your woman who was killed but the Crespo woman."

"So what? If it was the Crespo woman that was killed then I've nothing to do with the thing whatsoever. The Crespo woman—why, I don't even know her. She has never done me any wrong. If she was killed it was most certainly not my intention. In such a case it was just destiny. I'm not responsible for what destiny may do here in the village to people whom I don't know. The Crespo woman is a grown-up woman who can look out for herself and she doesn't need me to protect her. If she'd have taken better care of herself this would not have happened to her. I'm not her guardian and not her man either and I don't give a damn for women who don't take care of their health."

Natalio's cigarette is finished by now. He takes up his pickaxe and strikes furiously at the rocks, indicating that he has important work to do and that he cannot waste his time with idle talk which is of no interest to him.

Eight weeks later the case is up for trial.

Natalio is charged with murder. No degree is mentioned.

The jury consists of men from the village. Two of them are foremen in the mines, one is a carpenter, also in the mines, others are storekeepers, saloonkeepers, a butcher, a baker. None of them has any—even the slightest—interest in Natalio's conviction. They all depend on miners at work because no money can be coined out from miners in jail. As to applying justice they have a different opinion about what in a given case would be just and what unjust. Anyhow, they are, and without exception, willing to give their best to please both sides.

His friends have advised Natalio to keep his mouth shut, but must he open it he should never say anything outside of: "I don't know." This advice Natalio thinks very good because he hates working with his head. So it suits him fine and he is going to follow it.

He—that is Natalio—is not very deeply concerned as to the outcome of the trial. Should it happen that he is convicted and has to go to prison or even be sentenced to be shot, it will be all right with him. Should he be acquitted he will go back to his work which he likes immensely.

Right now he is rolling his cigarettes without showing even the faintest emotion. Nothing does he care about the juridical preliminaries just at this moment well under way in the simple courtroom located in the town hall, which is a one-storey affair of crumbling adobe.

The stage is set.

Everybody in the courtroom smokes cigarettes, the judge, the public prosecutor, the gentlemen of the jury, and the half dozen or so miners. These visitors have come not so much out of interest in the trial, for which they care not a damn, but they are not working because of injuries received in the mines and so they are here to while away their time as there is nothing else for them to do and they have no money to hang around the saloons. Some of them have their heads or faces bandaged, others carry their arms in slings, one has crutches leaning against his body.

"The defendant has fully confessed. The police officer, who questioned the defendant only a few days after the crime was committed, is present to be called on the witness stand should it so please your Honour and the honourable gentlemen of the jury."

El fiscal, that is the public prosecutor, has got a clear-cut case and he does not worry—he will bag a conviction just like that. What he really worries about is that he might not

be able to catch the train in time to return to town and that he might have to stay over night in this miserable, dirty, stinking mining village as he calls it.

He hasn't said much so far, but the jury already begins to dislike him for his manifest arrogance and for the way he shows how he detests the people here, especially miners, and how he hates to have been ordered to this godforsaken place where he cannot walk half a block without losing his shoes in the mud.

Not so much to save Natalio but only to see that overbearing fiscal miss the train and to let him go home beaten by the men he despises, the jury insist on their rights to question defendant and witnesses if they think it necessary to clear up the case for their better understanding. If through that procedure of the jury Natalio should benefit, so much the better, for the men on the bench like him for his being so calm and stoic.

One gentleman of the jury prays the judge to ask please the defendant if it be true that he has confessed to the murder.

Natalio rises clumsily. "I don't know, *señor*!" He sits down again, putting his cigarette between his lips.

Another gentleman wishes to see the written statement of Natalio's confession.

Nervously el fiscal jumps to his feet. "This statement, gentlemen of the jury, is written and signed only by the police officer since the defendant can neither read nor write. In due time I'll call the officer to testify here in court. The witness is an honourable and reliable police officer with an excellent record and many years' service. We have no cause to question his written and verbal statement nor the results of his so very carefully-made investigation of the case."

He bends down over his little table and starts fingering in his papers with growing uneasiness.

Another member of the jury wishes to know why he and his honourable colleagues of the jury should be obliged to believe more in the word of a policeman who receives his salary from the taxpayer's money, than in the word of an honest and sober miner as is the defendant, who does not live, and never did live on the money of the taxpaying citizens, but who works hard for his living and who produces valuable goods for the benefit of the whole nation.

A fourth gentleman wants the defendant to confess right

here and now and in the very face of the jury that he committed the crime charged with.

The judge calls Natalio. "You heard what the honourable gentleman of the jury wishes to know. Did you kill the Crespo woman?"

Natalio rises only halfway. Quietly he says, "I don't know, *señor*."

As if stuck with a pin from beneath, up bounds el fiscal, yelling at Natalio: "But you did throw the bomb, didn't you? Tell us the truth, my man. Lying won't help you. You did throw the bomb."

With a bored note in his voice Natalio says, "I don't know nothing." He sits down again and puffs away at his cigarette with signs of an undisturbed conscience.

El fiscal does not call the police agent as had been his intention a quarter of an hour ago. By now he knows the jury sufficiently well, and he knows also that these gentlemen—"Gentlemen, my eyes," he murmurs to himself—that these gentlemen would ask the police agent point blank if it is not true that he receives his salary from the taxes paid by the citizens. Having his confirmation, they would then ask the prosecutor also where his salary is coming from. After this they would, malicious as they are, ask quite seriously, if, since both these officials receive their salary from the same sources and therefore serve the same boss, if there might not exist among these two officials a certain combination with the object to convict an honest miner with no other purpose but to justify the necessity of their respective offices. Expecting such a layman's distortion of facts, el fiscal now plays a better card and cans the police agent for good.

He calls Filomena to the witness stand and also the rest of the party that was present when the bomb was thrown. These witnesses belong to the mining community and their testimony will be tight as no other, so that even the most spiteful of the members of the jury will have to accept it without any question. The prosecutor considers Filomena in particular his strongest trump. She is his star witness. She will tell the truth, for the bomb was meant for her, and she will feel more comfortable knowing Natalio is in prison for years.

Filomena and the other witnesses know perfectly well what the whole community knows, that is, that nobody else but Natalio has been the maker and thrower of the bomb. For Natalio has left no-one in the village doubtful as to who it

was who knew how to defend his honour and how to punish an unfaithful woman.

On the witness stand, though, these five witnesses declare without wavering that they have not seen the person who threw the bomb. When asked by the desperate fiscal whether they think that Natalio might have done it, they say that the bomb might have been thrown just as well by the former lover of the Crespo woman and who is known in the whole state as being very jealous and a very hot-tempered man who is ready to do anything if he feels insulted.

Filomena goes farther still. She says that she knows Natalio very well since she has been his *esposa* for a couple of years, and that she is absolutely sure that Natalio would never do such a thing as throw a bomb and he would be the last on earth, so help me the Lord, to throw a bomb against her who has been his wife and as she knows best that he has never had an affair with the Crespo woman, may the Holy Virgin bless her immortal soul, she cannot even dream that he might have wanted to do the Crespo woman any harm because he is not of any violent nature and he surely is the most peaceful man in the world she can think of.

"The prosecution rests." That's all the court hears from el fiscal.

The attorney for the defendant, provided for Natalio by the state, who has said not one word so far, stands up and says, "The defence rests also."

The jury retires.

In less than half an hour, for they have their business to attend to, they return.

"Not guilty!" is their verdict.

Natalio is set free immediately.

He and the witnesses, including Filomena and her new man, they all go to the nearest saloon to celebrate the acquittal with two bottles of *mezcal*. The bottles go from mouth to mouth with no-one ever using a glass, but everybody now and then shoving a pinch of salt mixed with red powdered, dried chile between his teeth.

After the bottles are finished, Natalio returns to his job as still a few hours of his working day are left which he, honest miner that he is, does not want to miss.

As usual, Saturday next, there is a dance at the village which Natalio attends. He meets a young woman who, knowing that he is a sober man who can stick by his job and earn

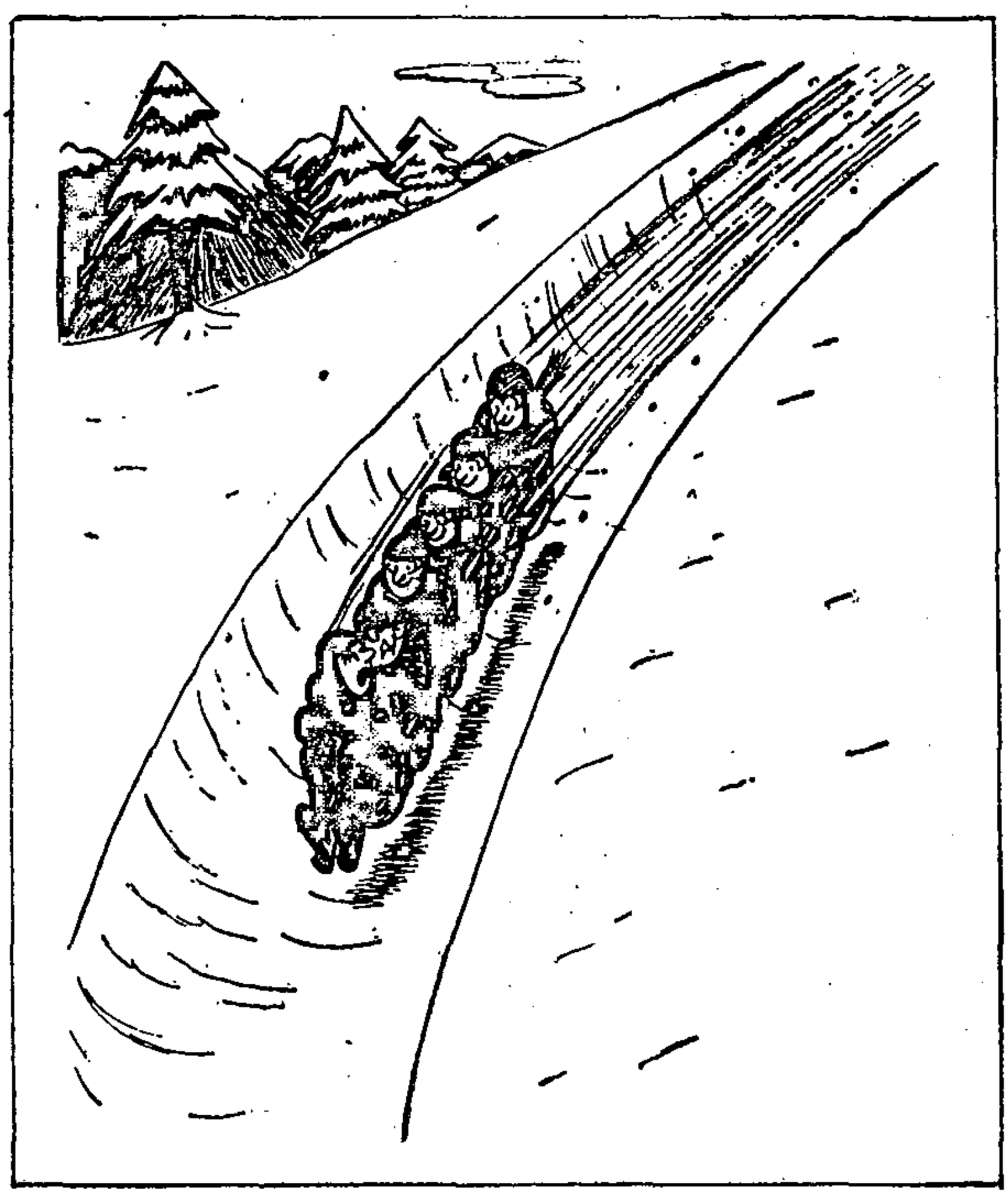
his money, accepts his proposition to live with him as his wife.

Next day, by noon, she arrives at his hut, bringing with her all her belongings put in a sugar sack which she hangs up at a peg.

Once settled, looked around and having cleaned up the home, she prepares supper.

Now it's evening. She puts the steaming hot beans on the table and while returning to the hearth she notes, lying right on the middle of the earthen floor, a fair-sized tin can to which is attached a fuse which smokes.

She escaped unhurt. Of Natalio, though, not even a shirt button could be found afterwards which she might have used to remember him by.



" Try not to alarm the others —
I think we've lost the sled."

A SUCCESSFUL AUTHOR

ANTOINE PAREAU hesitated for two weeks before he went to see Mlle Franchon, the *directrice* of one of the great popular theatres. Pareau was a very timid soul; he recalled that he had met her some years before and he put these few lines on the card which he handed to a secretary: *Dear lady, I don't know if you remember me. My name is Antoine Pareau. We were together some years ago at the Faliberts. If you could give me a few minutes . . .*

Mlle Franchon agreed to see him. Thin-blooded, she kept on her fur coat even in her office. Wrapped in this expensive abundance, she gave M. Pareau a glance of despair.

"Sit down, dear sir. I'm very busy, but sit down, anyhow. What can I do for you?"

He cleared his throat.

"Do you remember the Faliberts, madame?"

"I do not remember the Faliberts, my dear friend. I remember the shattering fiasco you had exactly twenty-seven years ago. It was an unforgettable flop. And your work has never been performed since."

Antoine Pareau's face reddened slowly. He felt ashamed. He was suddenly convinced that the wrapper of the play which he had brought to the lady-director was hardly presentable and was covered with innumerable fingerprints.

"I have a play, madame."

"A play!" she exclaimed.

She would have been less surprised, perhaps, if he had mentioned a pheasant, a peacock or a snowman. Anything would have been less astonishing . . . but a play, by Pareau . . .

"I think it's good," the playwright murmured.

The *directrice* shivered. I'm going to have flu, she thought

Nothing seemed to appeal to the public more than the idea of revenge

BY CHRISTINE ARNOTHY

and, unlike her usual self, she suddenly became malicious.

"Have you ever known a butcher who does not praise the quality and freshness of his meat? For an author his play is always good."

"As it happens," bleated Pareau, "I've found a basic idea that might affect a good many people. Revenge—this is something that interests everybody. *Monte Cristo* has been a very great success. Why? Well, because someone settled accounts in it. People were happy not because Monte Cristo won—but because his enemies were punished. You must admit this."

"So you have written a piece about Monte Cristo—if I understand you rightly?"

"No, madame," said Pareau. "I have written a play about revenge."

"That's even more old hat than incest, my friend. Revenge on the stage—my God! However, leave me your script, I'll ring you."

"But I have no telephone . . ."

She felt moved, almost. He hasn't a telephone!

"Then I'll write to you," she said, in a hypocritically charitable tone. "I'll write to you."

She knew that she would never write, that she would return his script by her underlings who specialised in the transportation of corpses with the multigraphed obituary notice: *Dear Sir, We have appreciated the considerable values of your play, its scintillating spirit, its striking dialogue—but unfortunately, our programme has already been settled for the next two years. Thus we cannot keep your play and prevent it from achieving the success which it deserves. Yours sincerely . . .*

"When are you going to write?" asked Pareau, already at the door.

Mlle Franchon made a gesture of despair.

"Don't ask me to give you a definite date—I'll write to you. However, I assure you, it would be better if you took the manuscript with you, right away. I shall not produce it. I'm sure that I won't produce it."

"If you could read it, madame..."

"All right. But it's only as a favour that I keep it. Goodbye; don't get discouraged."

For several weeks she did not even think of Pareau's play. The leading actor left the current production at her theatre. She could find no way of keeping him. After his departure the receipts at the box office began to decline sharply, and soon there was hardly any audience. In Mlle Franchon's mind the idea of revenge began to burgeon.

In her subconscious, the word formed a link with Pareau's piece.

One evening in her rosewood bed she read the script. This is utterly idiotic, she thought, irritated; utterly idiotic... But at the same time it was a play that could be produced cheaply. It had only four or five characters and a single set. If she took low-paid actors, she would be able to finish her season at very little cost.

She sent a note to Pareau and when he obeyed her summons, she told him, "I don't believe at all in your play. The dialogue is so stupid that it needs a hero—not just an actor—to repeat it thirty times. And I'm not figuring on running it for longer than a month. This is March 10th—we'll have the first night on May 1st and on June 1st we'll end the run."

"Maybe the public will like it," Pareau protested timidly.

"Like this?" exclaimed the *directrice*. "Oh no! Never! I have more experience of the theatre than you can ever hope for. I've suffered a terrible loss through this ham who left me in the middle of a success; I'll never be caught in the same way again. The actors I'm engaging for your play will have to sign a cast-iron contract so they cannot leave the play under any circumstance. Otherwise, with your dialogue, they might walk out after three days!"

Pareau agreed to everything. He was beaming when he descended the little iron staircase backstage and told an unemployed producer whom he met there, "I'm being presented at your theatre."

"Next autumn?"

"Oh no," he replied, still beaming. "In six weeks."

The producer knew at once that the author was only a stop-gap.

"Congratulations," he said, with an undisguised sneer. "Congratulations."

Mlle Franchon had no difficulty in finding some practically unknown actors who were unemployed. She made them sign a Draconic contract and the rehearsals started under the most unfavourable conditions imaginable. The *directrice* never turned up. She was not in the least interested in this intermezzo. The producer considered the author a madman at large, who might be locked up in an asylum at any moment. The actors were left to their own devices under the supervision of an assistant who was, himself, often absent. They did not take the whole business seriously until five days before the dress-rehearsal. Then, at last, they started to work very hard; after all, their honour was at stake.

Antoine Pareau did not attend the dress-rehearsal. He had no money to invite the actors to the customary supper after the first-night performance. He stayed at home, trembling in the furnished room he rented from an old lady in Passy.

Next day there were no reviews. It was only two days later that he learned of his immense and incredible success—when he read the articles of some critics of authority. The box office was already selling tickets for months ahead. There was no longer any question of closing the theatre for the summer. The miracle had happened.

Pareau hurried to the theatre. The *directrice* received him with open arms, embraced him and kissed him on both cheeks, planting a third kiss on his forehead.

"I know, my dear Antoine, I know. Would I have the courage to present your play without the sacred flame burning within me? With my experience I sensed that it could be a success. Well, I've taken the risk and now you're going to be rich."

Antoine Pareau managed somehow to hide his strong feelings. He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his perspiring forehead. He was very much tired by life; he was strongly aware of human wickedness—yet he was more vulnerable than a girl of fourteen. In the beginning, whenever he reminded himself of his success, he inevitably had tears in his eyes. The newspapers published two- and three-column interviews with this author who had defied the laws of nature by filling a

great theatre in July and August. He was a phenomenal creature.

The actors themselves became celebrities.

The male principal found himself a "discovery." He was already fifty, though he only admitted being forty-six. The journalists clamoured: *It is thanks to Pareau that he was able, at long last, to take his rightful place!*

The leading lady was twenty-eight when she was signed for the play. For the public, obviously, she couldn't be more than twenty-two. The whole cast who, until then, had been considered failures, now had become stars.

After two years Pareau bought the apartment from the old lady in Passy. As landlord, he kept her for a lodger. He also bought a small two-horsepower car. He knew that these purchases were the only follies of his life. The rest of his money he kept in a bank account, which increased considerably each month.

During this time there were ups and downs in world politics. On the days when it looked like war might break out within twenty-four hours—the yellow peril had become again a slogan, the freedom of the blacks a pretext—the world seemed to transform itself by returning to its hypocritical principles. But nothing—no event of any sort—could harm Antoine's play. Twenty-four hours before a threat of world war, some people decided that they wanted to see it while they still had the chance; then others, who had not seen it yet, celebrated the fact that war had been averted by going to the theatre and applauding it.

Seven years passed in this manner.

For a long time now Antoine had decided not to set foot in the theatre. He had the horrible fear that such a visit would bring bad luck. He was convinced that if he returned to those dim corridors whose smell he adored, his success would come to an abrupt end. Thus, the play continued its fantastic career. Nothing seemed to attract people more than the idea of revenge. This was the secret. Generations might come and go. Those who were buried had enjoyed Pareau's play. Those who came into the world would certainly go and see it one day. Revenge proved to be a gold-mine.

However, the years did not pass without the actors becoming truly sick. Not so ill that they could have stayed at home and proudly claimed a high temperature, but morally sick. They were depressed, outraged, exhausted by the words which, so it seemed to them, they had been repeating for ever.

There was absolutely no chance for them to leave the play. They had signed such a foolproof contract to this effect that even the greatest lawyers of Paris shook their heads and said, "You must wait. Maybe one day it will come to an end..."

The young leading lady had become thirty-five. The first wrinkles appeared, especially around the eyes. She had to laugh so much in this play that the skin of her forehead and under her eyes became like tiny fans that were being constantly opened and closed. She had one moment of hope—she thought she was pregnant. She imagined her triumph when she would announce to the management that she could no longer play a virgin of eighteen with a more-than-pronounced tummy. But after seven weeks she had a miscarriage and next day she again declaimed of her purity. Her eyes were blood-shot, her face livid. That night she was truly impressive.

Among themselves, the actors referred to the author as "the blackguard." "The blackguard has again reached the top box-office royalties."

"The blackguard had some photographers in to take pictures of the one-hundred-and-twenty-thousandth person to see the play."

"The blackguard hasn't set foot in the theatre for years."

"He has grown fat, the blackguard. No wonder, with the money he makes."

They couldn't go on any longer. They had endless nightmares. They kept on speaking their lines, even at home. They replied to their wives, their lovers, their mistresses, their cousins in Pareau's words. It was a hallucinatory hell.

During the eighth year they had an idea. In spite of all the profits they had drawn from revenge—each of them had an apartment, a substantial bank account, a car—they thought of nothing but revenge themselves. The leading actor had bought a country house near Paris. He loved it; it was the achievement of a life-long dream. He suggested that they kidnap the author, take him to this country house and force him to listen to his own play for twenty-four hours.

The cast then clubbed together to buy an advanced model of a tape-recorder which was capable of repeating the same text without stopping—changing the tapes automatically, practically for ever. They surrounded this machine with that twisted love parents feel for a child they did not want to bring into the world. There it was, in their midst, on a

table; attractive and repulsive, charming and frightening; full of buttons, switches, red and black markings and directions.

On their free day, that blessed day, they recorded the whole play. All five of them gave up their afternoon for this. But what happiness once they had finished! They drank a lot of champagne and were seized by the perverse curiosity of hearing themselves. "It isn't bad," said the leading actor. "Children, what freshness! How good we are!" They were still able to appreciate their own art, after eight years.

It was necessary to wait another week until their next free day came around. The young leading lady gave up her mornings to make some black hoods and yellow cloaks. On Monday they all piled into the leading man's huge American car. There was just room enough for a sixth person in it. At eleven that night, outside an old and decrepit house in Passy, they put on the cloaks, adjusted the hoods. Only their eyes showed and like spectres, they climbed the stairs on tiptoe and opened the author's door with a skeleton key one of them had procured. They were almost intimidated by the hall, in which the slight odour of cooking lingered. One by one they entered Antoine's study...

For the last four days Antoine had been working without a pause. He had found an idea which he thought good. For him it was always necessary to have some basic emotion in order to create a literary work. His great failure, at the start of his career, had been centred on the idea of happiness. Revenge had brought him glory. Now, he wanted to achieve his crowning success with a play about gratitude.

He was at his desk, huddled over his work. There were innumerable sheets of papers, some bearing a sentence, others just a reference, still others with only a single word or a question mark. Under the soft light of his desk lamp, Pareau felt as if the room were full of shadows—shadows of his own invention. He had an almost lustful desire to make these imaginary people whose souls were full of generosity, speak for themselves. A slight sound, coming from the direction of the door, attracted his attention. He shrugged, believing it was a trick of his imagination. The old lady slept in a room far from the main apartment of the house. As the doctors had forbidden Antoine to smoke, he took a small piece of candy from a silver box. His solitude seemed to be no burden tonight. He was filled and delightfully surprised by his new play.

The door opened with sudden violence. Antoine cried out

by EDMUND BURKE

THE canoe slipped quietly across the water, the three boys paddling it swiftly and smoothly towards their target. The sky, dull and dark with the approach of autumn, was harsh overhead and as they skirted islet after islet, they remembered that all these islands and the bay in which they lay were haunted. Old men said the dog of the devil had chosen Mahone Bay as his special territory, chosen it and held it.

The three boys were off on a camping trip. Anthony Vaughan, Daniel McInnis and Jack Smith, Nova Scotians all, were heading for Oak Island, the only island in Mahone Bay to boast a tree—the only one of three hundred and sixty-five which really amounted to anything. They drove the bow of the canoe on to the beach of a cove and stepped out.

With the afternoon ahead of them they set out on a leisurely exploration of the island. They pushed around a swamp, climbed one or two small hills and then crossed an old trail. It led towards the centre of the island, rising steadily as it went, until finally the boys found themselves on top of what was probably the largest hill on the island. There, just on the crest, and obviously at the end of the trail, stood an old oak tree, hoary with age, mossy and storm-battered. The three, clustering at its base, stared upwards and noticed high on its side that one limb had been sawn off.

As far as any of them knew, no-one lived on Oak Island, no-one ever had. The sawn-off branch hung above, a thick wooden question mark. Dan McInnis, the lightest of the three, began his preparations and, with the help of his two companions, he got up without much trouble and carefully made his way out on to the branch, tensing himself, dreading the sound of cracking wood. The stub held and he was within inches of the end. Under his hands were deep grooves in the wood, cut as though by block and tackle. Dan McInnis leaned forward and looked down.

His companions were standing looking up. He was about to call to them, when he noticed something odd, something strange, about the ground beneath. Vaughan and Smith were in the middle of a big circle, a circle that stood out plainly from where he sat. Yet Dan could remember nothing of the sort when he'd been down there. He backed slowly until he

once. He knew that he was not dreaming, for one of the spectres upset a small, valuable antique table. These unearthly beings, dressed in yellow cloaks and black hoods, exuded such hate that he was paralysed into silence. They encircled him and stretched out hands towards him. His heart raced madly. Suddenly he felt their eager hands lift him from his chair, tie him up and blindfold him.

The spectres carried Antoine Pareau downstairs and put him in the car. He was flanked closely by two of the actors. The third, who was driving, turned round and asked in a voice he deliberately disguised, "Can the old man breathe?"

"It's all right," came the answer. "We left his nostrils free."

For a few seconds they listened to Antoine's laboured breathing. Driving at a mad speed, they reached the country house very quickly. They picked Antoine up and carried him into a room where they tied him securely to an armchair.

"He's docile," said the leading lady savagely. "He is docile, the blackguard."

They started the tape-recorder and tiptoed from the room. They could hear the first few sentences. The tape-recorder sounded clear and loud.

They intended to free Antoine about nine o'clock next morning and take him back to his home. Counting on his weakness, they justified themselves, with some malice, by saying that they wanted him at last to appreciate his own words in full measure.

"The blackguard is capable of falling asleep," said the leading lady. "We didn't think of this possibility. If he does, he won't hear his play."

They returned at seven o'clock next morning. They were haggard and grey from the cigarettes they had chain-smoked during their night of revenge. The leading lady found herself quite ugly when she glanced into a mirror, and the leading actor's chin was blue and bristly.

"We'll have breakfast with him," he said now. "He won't abuse us so much if we feed him."

They found Antoine in the same position in which they had left him. There was one single difference: he was no longer supple and warm, but rigid and cold.

"B-but he is dead!" exclaimed the leading actor.

"Oh, the blackguard!" cried the others, like a Greek chorus.

And suddenly they were all seized by indescribable terror. They had killed their author.

Antoine's eyes were closed under the bandage, his lips were pressed together over the gag. His face was swollen and flabby. They were unable to place him on a bed. It was a sitting corpse they deposited on the divan. They notified the police. It was the only solution. And they told the inspector everything candidly.

Their trial caused an enormous sensation. Until the final day they were allowed bail so that they could continue to perform. They were all sentenced to three years in prison—but the sentence was suspended. The *directrice* told them; "My dear idiots, you had such press notices that the play is bound to run another eight years. You'll understand, I'm sure, that I can't possibly release you . . ."

So their prison was right there, on the stage.

One day, Mlle Franchon took a large bouquet of flowers to the grave of her favourite author.

"Poor Antoine," she said, while pretending to pray. "He had a fine sense of publicity . . ."

© Christine Arnothy 1963

Translated from the French by Paul Tabori

Gin and — *Whoosh*

When that irresistibly funny actress and comedienne Dora Bryan played her famous scriptwriter role in the West End production of *Simon and Laura*, she had a very simple bit of business: pouring out a gin and tonic. One evening, having poured the gin into the glass, she picked up the tonic-bottle and searched the drinks tray in vain. No opener.

This was a serious moment in the play. What was she to do: wrench off the crown cap, ever so elegantly, with her teeth? But all was not lost. A soda syphon stood on the tray.

As everyone knows, syphons are usually patient beasts; perfect examples of self-control as they wait for their cues. This one, though, was overjoyed at suddenly being called upon to play a part. The instant Dora Bryan touched the lever, it unleashed a fearful display of hydraulics. *Whoosh*—a huge squirt of water shot into the glass and straight out again.

She moved delicately through the remainder of the scene, her satin dress absolutely drenched.

KENNETH MORE, *Kindly Leave the Stage*

SOCCER QUIZ

1. How many times, and in which years since league football was resumed in 1946, has Arsenal won the Championship of the First Division?

2. In which countries are the following top-flight European soccer clubs?
   (a) Anderlecht, (b) Gornik, (c) Slovan Bratislava.

3. Which Luton Town captain was elected "Footballer of the Year" by the Football Writers' Association, in May, 1959?

4. Of which English clubs are these the nicknames?
   (a) The Cobblers, (b) The Biscuitmen, (c) The Canaries.

5. In which year did Tottenham Hotspur achieve the "double" of winning the FA Cup and the First Division Championship?

6. For which clubs did these former England international goalkeepers play?
   (a) Ted Ditchburn, (b) Gil Merrick, (c) Bernard Streten.

7. Can an English Third Division club participate in the European Cup?

8. The club that finished the 1964-65 season as champion of the Scottish League Division One was:
   (a) Dundee United, (b) Falkirk, (c) Kilmarnock?

9. If a club manages to reach the sixth round of the FA Cup competition, has it reached the last sixteen, the quarter-final, the semi-final, or the final?

10. Which English clubs have their home grounds at:
    (a) Bramall Lane, (b) Elland Road, (c) Filbert Street?

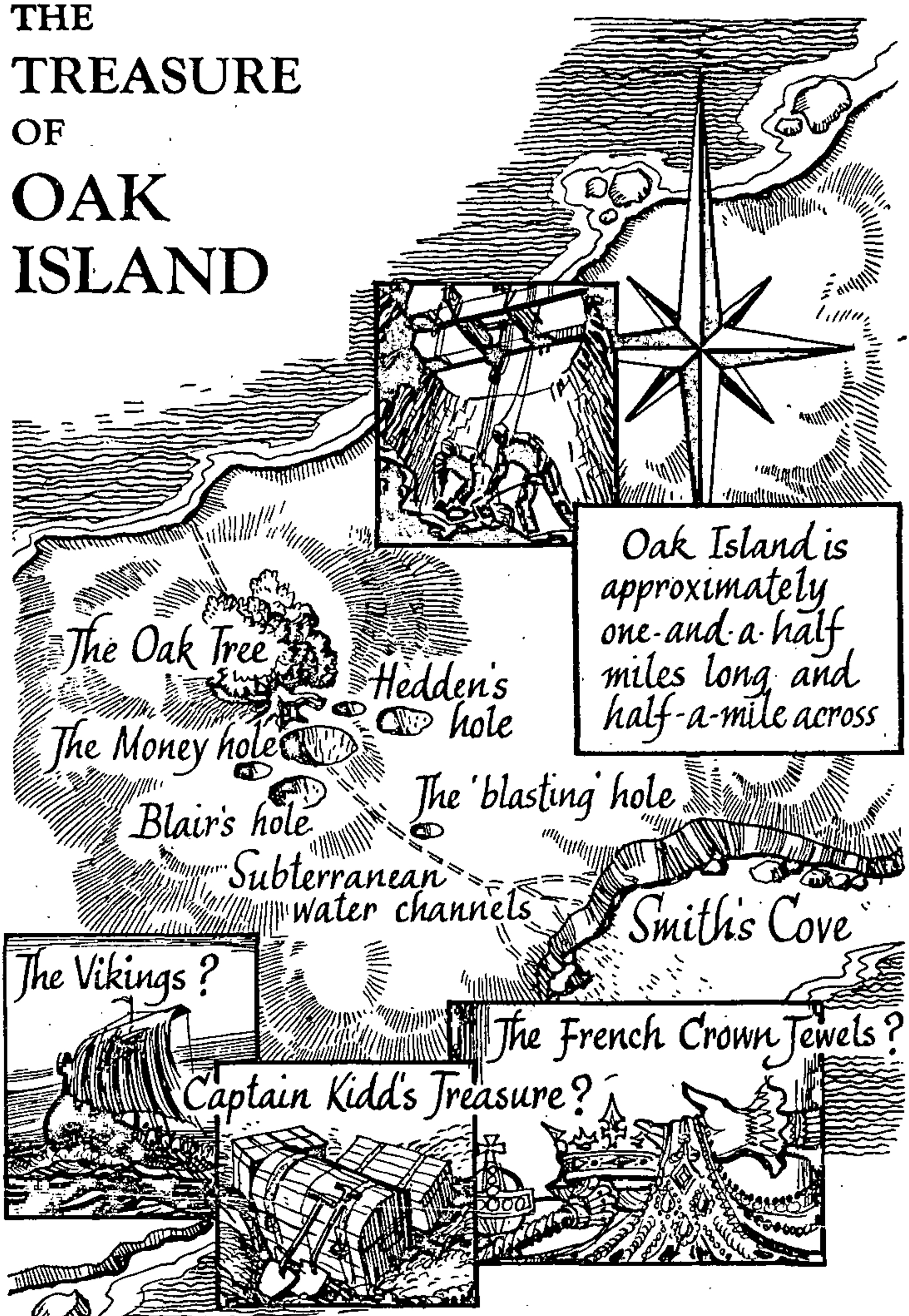
11. Name the European country that won the 1954 World Cup.

12. In which position did Denis Compton play when Arsenal defeated Liverpool 2-0 in the 1950 FA Cup Final?

On the ball? Turn to page 117 to find out how you've done.

104

THE TREASURE OF OAK ISLAND



A true story of the men who believed in a strange legend of buried gold

reached the massive trunk and then hastily slid and fell to the ground. While his mystified companions watched he bent down and began to trace the outline of the circle he'd seen . . .

Nova Scotia was full of tales of pirates and buccaneers, tales of dead men and ghosts, of slaughtered prisoners and buried treasure. The three had heard them all and it seemed no more than reasonable that they had stumbled on to the site of one of the fabled *caches*. The circle, so plain from above, was hard to see from the ground level but they measured it roughly. Thirteen feet it was, just about right for the burial of a treasure chest.

The three boys were so sure they'd stumbled on something of value that they did indeed set about digging, the very next morning. They were young and healthy and if there was a bite in the air, if the sun had lost its summer warmth, they made up for it by digging hard. They'd been back to the mainland and laid in a stock of food to supplement their camping supplies, as well as tools for the job in hand. And so they dug, young strong muscles dislodging the soil as rapidly as possible.

The big hole went down, and down, spade depth by spade depth. Two feet, three feet, four feet, five feet—still they dug. At eight feet they began to wonder if they'd been right. There was no sign now that the earth had ever been touched, nothing to prove that their guesses were right, only the outline of the circle to guide them, as they delved patiently downwards. At nine feet they began to tire. It was a matter now of just one more foot—then if there was nothing, they'd quit, say they'd been wrong.

At ten feet, the three boys found themselves standing on a rough platform of oak planks, stretching solidly across the hole. Now, suddenly, there was an urgency in their digging. They tore at the sides, ripping the planks out—and still there was nothing. Only a layer of wood, solid oak and five inches thick, to prove that they were right or wrong. There was a council of war then, to decide whether or not they should dig farther. The conclusion was both obvious and foregone—no-one would dig ten feet down in the island's hard soil to bury a platform of oak planks unless there was something to hide. They voted to go on digging.

For the rest of that autumn they dug. They made it down just below the twenty-foot mark, working in shifts. At twenty feet they found another layer of oak planking, as solid as the first. That was the only thing they found to give them hope,

but it was enough. They finally decided to give it up—for that year at least. But they made a pact to come back the following spring.

So it went on for seven years. The three boys grew up and became men. Smith and McInnis married and brought their wives out to the island, farming a little, trapping a little—and always digging. Each time they reached another ten feet down into the hard soil of the island they'd find another layer of planking, as regularly as clockwork. The digging had long since ceased to be easy: they were moving each spadeful, each bucketful to the surface with a hand-operated hoist, trimming the sides and waiting for the day. The big hole had a name now—they called it the Money Hole, and people on the mainland laughed but secretly wanted to join them.

In 1803, Jack Smith's wife became pregnant and he took her ashore to Truro to a doctor. While she and her husband waited for the birth of the child they talked to the doctor, John Lynds, and he asked them about the Money Hole. Jack Smith aroused Dr. Lynds' interest in the idea; and the next year, backed by some of his friends in Truro, Dr. Lynds formed the Oak Island Treasure Company. The three original finders were members, but now there was money; money to buy tools and to hire more men.

Many hands made light work and the pit dropped deeper and deeper. The hole was larger now, to accommodate the workmen, and every ten feet a fresh layer of planks appeared. The three boys had not been wrong. At eighty feet below the surface something new intruded itself—just below the planks was a three-inch layer of charcoal, completely covering the thirteen-foot circle. And they had no sooner dug through the charcoal when they uncovered a layer of something unknown.

It was a natural fibre, that much was indisputable, but no-one on the island could identify it. Hastily a sample was dispatched to the mainland and the entire crew waited for the result. When it came, they were no closer to a solution of the mystery—in fact it was, if anything, more confusing. They'd found a six-inch layer of the outer fibre from coconut shells. A quick glance at the map will show just how far Nova Scotia is from any source of coconuts. A single shell might have floated there, but not enough to have covered an area six inches deep and over one hundred and thirty feet around. If there had ever been any question, the fibre answered it—the Money Hole was definitely man-made.

The coconut fibre was a spur, and the men dug even harder. At ninety feet they found yet another mystery, this time a three-inch layer of ship's putty. It was as though the makers had been determined to baffle and confuse, and the final confusion arose when just beneath the putty, the excavators uncovered a flat stone.

Measuring some three feet long and perhaps fifteen or sixteen inches wide, it was thin and covered with fine markings. No-one was able to decipher them, and Jack Smith took the stone off to his cabin.

For many years it formed part of the Smith fireplace but it was later transferred to the mainland. The last trace of it was in 1928, when someone remembered, vaguely, having seen it used as a door-stop in a Halifax office. It is still possible that the stone is in existence somewhere, equally possible that it might hold the solution to this fantastic riddle, but in 1804 none of the members of the Oak Island Treasure Company considered how large a part the stone might play in their search.

One Saturday, someone pushed a rod down into the floor of the pit just below the stone. It pushed through the soil quite easily and then, as expected, struck wood at the hundred-foot mark. The listening men thought they could hear a dull booming sound under their feet, and if it hadn't been quite so late they'd have gone on digging. As it was, Saturday night had come and they went ashore thinking of Monday and the few feet of earth which lay between them and their goal.

Along the shore of Mahone Bay lay several small groups of houses and by mid-afternoon on Sunday the news had spread to all of them. Even the most diehard sceptics were convinced and all that night the matter was discussed feverishly. When Monday morning came, curious eyes watched the progress of the small fleet of boats that ferried the workers back to their task. On Oak Island the men almost ran up the long well-worn trail to the Money Hole—and there they halted, their mouths agape.

At their feet was the Hole but now it was nearly full of water. Sounding lines proved that a solid body of water, just over sixty feet deep, lay between them and their target . . . Dr. Lynds approached the matter logically. He knew of the existence of several fresh-water springs. To him it was obvious that Saturday's probe with the rod had broken into the course of one of them—with the resulting flood. Now it was simply a matter of driving a parallel shaft close to the Money Hole

and from it a gallery, which would come in below the spring.

Lynds' logic was excellent, as far as it went, and he succeeded in selling the idea to his fellow stockholders. What he seems to have overlooked in his thinking was the fact that the original builders of the Money Hole would have had to go through the spring, if his assessment of the situation was correct. However, work was begun on the parallel shaft and continued to a depth of nearly one hundred and ten feet. The working level was now well below that of the first excavation and there was no sign of water. It seemed safe to drive their horizontal gallery now, across, beneath the source of the spring.

They didn't get far—the water nearly drowned two of the diggers, and when it finished rising it was on a level with that in the Money Hole. In less than an hour, weeks of digging were completely submerged. With that second flood the hopes of the first Oak Island Treasure Company were defeated.

Nearly fifty years later, in 1849, a second company was formed, again with the name of the Oak Island Treasure Company. Jack Smith and Daniel McInnis were dead, but Anthony Vaughan led the hopefuls to the site himself. Dr. Lynds was a member of the second company, his faith had stood the test of the years and he was quite willing to invest money in the new scheme. The rest of the members of the syndicate were hardheaded business men and before they put any great amount of money into the venture, they were determined to know what it was, exactly, that they were after. They hired an itinerant coal miner named Pitalbo to help them in answering that vital question.

James Pitalbo travelled the surrounding countryside working in the pits when they would hire him and spending the rest of his time inventing. One device permitted sampling the subsoil without the necessity of digging a shaft. Simple in principle, it was revolutionary for its day. His gadget was a bit which turned on the end of a free shaft; the shaft itself was pushed around by a horse, and once in position it bored its way deeper into the ground, sampling anything it encountered. By pulling it at any level it was possible to tell just exactly what was down there.

Pitalbo and his device were installed on Oak Island and a platform was built right across the first pit, above the waterline. Before an excited crowd of spectators and speculators, Pitalbo began operations. At one hundred feet the pod or bit revealed the oak planking which had been sounded so many years

before. After a few more turns there were samples of spruce, which appeared to form a layer five inches through. Then suddenly the bit went into empty air, an open space a foot deep. After that came another layer of oak, this time four inches through. Finally there was a layer of loose material, which steadfastly refused to permit sampling.

Each time Pitalbo put the bit down it spun reluctantly—indicating that something was there—but nothing came up. He had drawn it up again when Dr. Lynds noticed a bright bit of colour adhering to its side. Eagerly the men grasped at it—*three tiny links of gold* were clinging to the clay. The fragment passed from hand to hand as men's eyes lighted with gold fever. In the meantime canny James Pitalbo dropped the bit again, took another sample and began to examine his core.

A member of the syndicate saw Pitalbo pocket something from the core. He told Dr. Lynds what he had seen and the doctor demanded that Pitalbo give them what he'd found. The miner protested strongly, and then promised to show everyone his find next day, when there was to be an official meeting of the members of the company. During the night Pitalbo decamped leaving his equipment behind him. He disappeared from the area. Later that winter he was killed in a mine accident and, as far as anyone knows, he took with him to his grave the secret of what he had found on the bit.

Although Pitalbo—and his clue—were gone, the vital equipment was still there and the company soon learned to use it. Day after day they probed through the water, through the earth, measuring, checking, measuring and rechecking. In the end they came to the conclusion that there were two layers of loose, unsamplable material. The first measured either twenty or twenty-two inches through and was immediately followed by eight inches of oak, then another twenty-two inches of loose stuff and finally four more inches of oak.

Logical deductions based on these figures saw two ship's chests, stacked one on top of the other—and of course, filled with treasure. The chests were located roughly in the middle of the old thirteen-foot circle; there had been three gold links —no further proof was needed.

The work began in earnest then, a second matching shaft being dug, just ten feet away from the original Money Hole. At a depth of one hundred and ten feet they stopped and tried once more to drive a secondary shaft towards the first digging. And once again water poured in, and filled this pit as fast as it had the others.

It was only then that someone began to interpret the regular, matching rise and fall of the water-level in all three pits for what it was: the result of the tide—one of the workmen fell into the Money Hole and came up with his mouth full of salt water. They were battling with the sea itself.

Dr. Lynds had been wrong, and he was perfectly willing to admit it. Now he remembered a point which he'd noted when he was first brought to the island beach at Smith's Cove. It had been smooth, not with a natural smoothness but rather with an almost artificial quality. Perhaps the sea was entering at the Cove.

Moving the entire crew down to the beach in Smith's Cove, they began to dig there. Beneath the surface sand they found a firm layer of gravel, which in turn was succeeded by a stratum of boulders. At first the boulders seemed to lie haphazardly but closer examination showed that they formed a huge, irregular pattern, which allowed the tidal floods to move freely through. Beneath the boulders was a layer of eel grass, one of the more common aquatic plants of the region, but obviously cut and laid in position by plan. And beneath the eel grass was a massive layer of coconut fibre, tons and tons of the tropical material. Finally, beneath this big coconut "mat," was a series of five, stone-lined channels, leading from the sea back towards the location of the Money Hole.

At some time, someone with a thorough working knowledge of engineering and hydrodynamics had built a highly ingenious system which would ensure a constant flow of water inland from the sea. Although the tide would ordinarily have affected its working, the coconut fibre and the eel grass formed a perfect sponge which would empty itself when the tide was out. The whole project was so well conceived and executed that to the members of the Company it seemed impossible that they would ever be able to drain the Money Hole. They had no pumps which could possibly cope with the sea. There remained only one course which might allow them to reach their golden goal —they must stop the sea before it reached the Cove.

With the last of their money they began to build a coffer dam offshore. Built high enough and strong enough it would block the tide, and eventually they might be able to drain the Money Hole. A sudden storm, rising in the Bay, smashed the coffer dam before it was completed and the second Oak Island Treasure Company was out of business.

There followed another period when there was no real organised activity on Oak Island. Still, the legend grew, as

treasure legends do and in 1893, a third company was formed by Frederik Blair. Astute and intelligent, Blair marshalled his resources carefully. He hired over one hundred labourers and engaged the services of a firm of mining engineers as consultants.

The first point of attack was a new one. Recently, one of the island men had been ploughing with a team of oxen. Suddenly the oxen stumbled and disappeared into a hole which opened beneath them. The hole, fifteen feet deep, lay in a direct line between the original Money Hole and Smith's Cove. The engineers reasoned that it must have some bearing on the problem, and they set their men and machinery to work, investigating. At a depth of sixty feet they found salt water running. In the hope that this was the main channel feeding the sea into the Money Hole, they blasted. The effort ended in failure for there was no lessening of the water which flowed towards the pit.

Next, Blair moved down to the Cove and sank a series of holes to a depth of seventy feet. These were packed with dynamite and then blown.

The concussion should have blocked the channels from the sea—but it didn't. The only answer was to go inland and reattack the original site.

The result was what might have been expected. A new hole was dug adjacent to the Money Hole and, when it reached a depth of one hundred and ten feet, a horizontal tunnel was started. Blair's men never reached the Money Hole. Instead, they found a stone-filled channel, measuring two feet six inches square. This was the landward end of the sea conduit but all their efforts to block it failed, and salt water continued to block them. As a last resort, Blair turned to drilling.

Using a three-inch pipe, he sank a two-and-a-half inch drill. The engineers on the project reasoned that water pressure, plus the disturbances created by the now many shafts, both vertical and horizontal, might easily have displaced the treasure. But the drill struck something at one hundred and twenty-five feet. There were bits of iron and bits of wood in the stuff brought up and the driller in charge swore on oath that the drill had pierced what "appeared to be chests and coins." There is a big question mark here, since iron and oak may indicate chests but there is no proof of coins. Whether the master driller, William Chapel, knew more than he told must remain one of the minor mysteries, like that of James Pitalbo.

Blair ordered the bore to be sunk farther. At one hundred

and fifty-three feet, they met one of the greatest surprises of all —a tough layer that reacted like solid stone. The drill finally bit through it and when the core was surfaced it looked exactly like concrete. The core was immediately shipped to England, for analysis.

The London report was succinct. According to A. Boake Roberts & Co. Ltd., the material in question was cement and had been set there by men. From the report and from the on-site drilling, Blair established, to his own satisfaction at least, that deep in the ground was a concrete chamber, with a roof three feet in thickness, which was seven feet high and which had a floor as thick as its roof. From parallel drilling they even established the other dimension of the chamber, stating that it was five feet wide.

Blair and his partners had made a great deal of progress but unluckily for them funds were beginning to run short. In a final effort, Blair decided to find out exactly where the water from the Money Hole went, on its return to the sea. Stationing men all along the shore of Smith's Cove and the immediate shoreline, he dropped a strong red dye in the pit itself. The men waited for hours, yet there was nothing.

Acting on a hunch, Blair sent more men out, this time to the other side of the Island. Sure enough, the red stain was marking the sea, on the other side of Oak Island from Smith's Cove. It was no longer a question of one intricate maze of artificial waterways, but of two, one on the north shore, one on the south. And, after the previous experiences with one set, it seemed unlikely that the newly-discovered channels could be blocked.

Resignedly, Blair closed down his operations; his cash and credit both exhausted. He did, however, take the precaution in 1905 of obtaining a grant to treasure trove both from the Crown and from the Canadian Parliament. The grant, which was to run for forty years, would give him a chance to recoup and try again.

Four years after the issuance of the grant, a four-man party tried again, apparently with Blair's permission. This time the treasure-hunters were Frederik Childs, Albert Gallatin, Duncan Harris and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was later to become President of the United States. At his mother's summer house near New Brunswick, young Roosevelt had heard the story of the Money Hole and persuaded his friends to join him in a holiday "lark." Between them they raised about two

thousand pounds and brought a big drill to Oak Island. It had a maximum reach of one hundred and fifty feet and on several occasions touched that depth. Each time, the cores showed the same result, confirmed by analysts at New York's Columbia University. Down there, under the Money Hole, was man-made rocklike material. The earlier report, from London, had been amply confirmed.

There was another thirteen-year period then when there was little interest in the island. In 1922 Blair came back, this time with a New York partner, J. B. Cameron, who had had a great deal of contracting experience. There was the usual complement of labour and an assortment of heavy machinery but the water defeated them again and Blair withdrew to lick his financial wounds.

Six years later a writer chanced on the story and published it in an influential New York newspaper. The account attracted the attention of Gilbert Hedden, a moderately wealthy and partially retired American business man. The mystery appealed to Hedden and he spent the next six years making frequent trips to Oak Island and researching the entire story. At the end of that time, in 1934, he formed his own syndicate, which included Blair. The latter's Crown grant was still operative and to make the transaction legal, the syndicate purchased the entire south-west section of the island. Then they engaged the services of a firm of mining engineers and set to work.

The official start of Operation Hedden began in 1935, with the laying of submarine power cables over to the island and the installation of more equipment. Hedden and his advisers were banking on the idea that modern equipment would be more than able to cope with the flow of water. They set their pumps in readiness and began to dig still one more shaft, next to the Money Hole.

This time though, there was a difference in the operation when they reached the water level; they turned and ran their parallel shaft directly at Blair's square channel, rather than the base of the Money Hole. Experts had calculated that the flow from the channel was at a rate of five hundred gallons per minute, so Hedden had his pumps arranged to accommodate twice that amount. When they struck the channel the pumps began and for the first time the Money Hole was without its water barrier. Other pumps began to work then, actually clearing the water out of the big hole.

In 1937 the Money Hole was not only cut off from its source but it was actually dry and digging began again. All the

accumulated debris of the years was cleared out, the walls shored carefully and thoroughly. Yet at one hundred and fifty-five feet there was still no trace of chests, treasure, or concrete chambers. The only conclusion Hedden could reach was that during the years of work in the area, the many holes and shafts had collapsed and caused the material to slip sideways and perhaps to sink even farther into the earth. Then the devil of finance made its appearance, putting a halt to the dig.

Two years later another expedition tried, this one headed by a mechanical engineer, Edwin Hamilton. He worked for three summers, operating on a small scale until World War II brought a halt to the digging. Hamilton reached a depth of one hundred and ninety-one feet, striking thick gravel at one hundred and seventy-one and again at his maximum depth. Although he discovered the outlet to the southern set of water channels, he found no trace of the treasure.

Hamilton's work was the last really serious effort. At the end of the war various small parties tried their hands at the game but they met with no more success than had their predecessors.

Recent newspaper accounts told of a man setting off from New York for Oak Island—for his sixth try at the elusive golden goal. Sometimes though, you wonder just how much gold, if any, is buried in that mysterious Money Hole.

Three main ideas have been put forward to account for the *cache*. One is simply that it is pirate loot, buried against the time when the owners would be free to come and reclaim their property. A second advances the idea that it is the site of the long lost French Crown jewels. Various researchers and scholars have said that when Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were captured at Varennes, one of the ladies of the court made her escape, carrying the jewels. Further research has located traces of a French woman in Louisburg, Nova Scotia, who might or might not have been this same lady. At any rate, no trace of the jewels has ever been found.

The third idea, put forth in 1930, is that there is no treasure involved but that the Money Hole is all that remains of a Viking colony on the site. There is ample proof that the Vikings did explore the coast of North America, long before 1492. It is also possible, although today less well verified, that they actually founded settlements at various points on that same coast. But there is nothing about Oak Island and its Money Hole which fits in with anything we know about the Vikings.

If we dismiss this as guesswork, we are left with two possibilities—the pirate idea, or the romantic notion that the French Crown jewels are hidden there, beneath the old oak tree.

Oak Island lies just offshore in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia. Running roughly east and west, it is approximately one-and-a-half miles long and about a half-mile in width. It is one of three hundred and sixty-five islands and islets in the Bay, and the only one to bear an oak tree.

At some date prior to 1795 a party landed on the island, unobserved by anyone from the nearby coastal villages and began what amounted to a major engineering project. These unknown persons dug a hole thirteen feet in diameter, which went down to a known depth of one hundred and sixty feet. At the bottom they built what we assume to be a concrete chamber seven feet high and five feet wide, with sides which were three feet thick. Approximately sixty feet above, during the course of refilling their hole, they deposited two oak chests, one on top of the other. Just above the chests they placed a flat stone slab and immediately atop the stone, a thick layer of ship's putty. Above that was a layer of coconut matting fibre and then a layer of charcoal.

Finally, they placed solid oak platforms across the hole at ten foot intervals until they reached the surface. The spaces between the oak platforms were filled with soil. While this project was going on, and timed so that the work must have coincided, they were also building an intricate system of artificial waterways leading in from the sea on either side. In order to maintain and utilise the flow of tidal water, the waterways had to be constructed at sea level, so that when they reached the Money Hole they were nearly ninety feet below the surface of the ground. This meant that these channels had to be cut for a total distance of a half-mile, at roughly that same depth, allowing for variations in the island's surface.

On the Smith's Cove side at least (the other side has never been excavated), the work involved the use of some several tons of coconut fibre matting, to make the tidal sponge, as well as enough eel grass to form a foot-thick mattress extending over a distance of one hundred and fifty feet. These facts are largely indisputable, although some of them are based on cores and measurements made out of the sight of man. There isn't any reason though, to suppose that any of the serious hunters ever tried to delude either themselves or the public. If we accept these facts—and we must—we can begin to make a mental picture of what it all involved.

There must have been a large working party, one with a minimum of twenty workmen. At their head there would have been at least one person with a sound and thorough knowledge of engineering theory and practice; a man or men capable of planning and carrying out the entire operation. There must, in addition, have been one or more ships of considerable tonnage. If there was only one, it must have made several trips for the sheer bulk of the coconut fibre would have more than made cargo for the average ship of the period prior to 1795. Finally, there must have been a considerable amount of cement available.

Most of the researchers into Oak Island have felt that it was the repository for the treasure of the famous Captain William Kidd. That pirate had been hanged nearly a hundred years before Smith, Vaughan and McInnis started digging, which allowed ample time for weathering and partial effacement of the traces. But there is no proof that Kidd, his officers or men would have had the necessary technical knowledge to undertake the involved engineering and construction on which the mystery is founded. Nor is there evidence that Kidd's crews were so loyal as to carry the secret to their graves.

Some day perhaps we shall read that someone has gone down to the bottom of the Money Hole with a metal detector and actually found the treasure chests. Then perhaps we'll know what's there—and who put it there . . . But no matter how you look at it, no matter which guess you believe in, Oak Island still stands, rather remote, rather bleak and seemingly full of mystery.

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ANSWERS TO SOCCER QUIZ ON PAGE 103

1. Twice—in 1948 and 1953.
2. (a) Belgium, (b) Poland, (c) Czechoslovakia.
3. Syd Owen, whose club was runner-up in the 1959 FA Cup Final.
4. (a) Northampton Town, (b) Reading, (c) Norwich City.
5. 1961.
6. (a) Tottenham Hotspur, (b) Birmingham City, (c) Luton Town.
7. No. Only the club finishing the previous season top of the First Division is eligible to compete for the European Cup.
8. (c). 9. The quarter-final.
10. (a) Sheffield United, (b) Leeds United, (c) Leicester City.
11. West Germany. 12. Outside-left.

BY LAWRENCE HAMMOND

A Life to Lose

BEGINNING A TENSE NEW SERIAL

A hidden fortune draws the ruthless and the innocent to Corsica — into a web of violence and death

ON AN evening in early April, when the darkening air held a hint of summer to come, an Englishman was walking through the streets in the French city of Marseilles. His name was Thomas Webb and he was thirty-eight years old. He spoke French as fluently as he spoke English. Indeed, during the years that he had worked in North Africa and the months he had lived in Marseilles, French had become his first language. He used English only when he swore or when he talked to himself: he imagined that the tiny effort of switching languages at moments of irritation brought an instant detachment which served to brake the violent bad temper that he feared was often near the surface.

He made for the Old Port, moving easily through the jostling crowds: not minding them, rather enjoying them. After the death of Claire, he had felt not so much lost, as numbed. He was apart. He was a part of nothing, of no-one.

Friends at that time spoke the soft clichés of commiseration and he smiled back in silence—apologetically, knowing that his grief was an embarrassment to the busy trivia of their lives. He came to expect the words of sympathy and listened for his own voice's inadequate reply.

He had moved through the final days of clearing up the job in Algiers with the thoughtless efficiency of habit and, as he did so, he sometimes felt apart even from himself. The feeling came to him again and again: I'm watching myself, and listening to myself. Perhaps I am dead too. Perhaps this is how it is—and you go on for days and weeks without realising that you are no longer alive.

That was when he decided not to return to England—not yet. He decided instead to go back to Marseilles, to the flat from which he had married; to comfort and gain comfort from Claire's mother.

And so, one day in January, he had found himself, bag in hand, raincoat over shoulder, walking up the narrow street of return.

When the old woman had opened the door, he realised all at once that he did not know her. She stood there, a square figure in a grey overall, and his embarrassment treacherously took refuge in flippancy. He said, stupidly, "Remember me? I married your daughter."

She had looked at him in silence; then stood aside for him to enter the tiny flat.

Every day since then he had promised himself that soon he would go back to work, soon pick up the threads of his life; but meantime, he would sit about the flat, read, and talk, and think; and, every night, run out of cigarettes.

He had taken to returning to the same café each evening and staying on for a *pastis* or two. He was, by now, so familiar there that he was accepted as part of the furnishings.

This April night his drink appeared, unordered, as soon as he sat at his usual table alongside the illuminated green aquarium that divided the *terrasse*. He sipped his drink; he read the paper; time passed. He watched the fish; and time passed.

Suddenly through the yellow-green water of the fish-tank, distorted by the gentle swirl, he saw a face. It was pressed to the glass on the other side of the tank. It looked unpleasant—as any face would, seen through an aquarium—and it was watching him.

"Pleasant view," he muttered in English.

The squashed-looking face still stared. Webb sucked in his cheeks, pursed his lips, and went, "Glob, glob." He said in French, "I'm a fish."

The watcher's mouth opened, there was a toothy gleam of purer gold than the fish, then he rose and hurried to a table in the far corner occupied by a large man wearing a white suit and a flat-crowned black hat. The watcher—thin, bent-shouldered and of a colour which looked mostly Arab—burst into gesticulations and gabble to the large man. One of his waving hands tapped his forehead repeatedly.

"That's right, the Englishman's mad," Webb said to himself, and returned to the contemplation of his drink.

"Hey, English!"

Webb looked up.

"English! Come over here!"

The voice belonged to the large man. He beckoned. Webb rose, walked over slowly and stood by his table.

"Sit yourself down," said the large man. The only other chair at the table was occupied by the Arab, still watching.

Webb turned to pull up another chair. The large man clouted the Arab, who stood, hastily, and Webb took his seat.

The large man pushed over a *pastis*. "Do you always come when you are called?" he asked. The Arab giggled. Webb, in silence, watered the drink and watched its milky swirl. "Tell me, do you always do what you are told? Hey, English?"

Webb used one of the few really noisome phrases he knew, which happened to be in Arabic. The Arab snickered. The big man clouted him again, not taking his hard eyes from Webb's. Then he burst into laughter. "Max," he said. "Big Max," and held out his hand.

A lot of Corsicans who emigrate to the Continent—which is how they refer to France—get no farther than Marseilles, the port of their disembarkation. It is often said by the French that these tough and taciturn islanders then invariably do one of two things; they either join the underworld or they join the police.

That Max Genovese found himself on one side of the law and not the other was largely a matter of chance. But Max had brain as well as brutality. Since he had arrived in Marseilles in 1946, he had carved a sizeable kingdom for himself with well-organised specialisations in protection, smuggling and sex. He kept his kingdom inviolate from the jungle warfare of the underworld by a system of alliances with other gang leaders. He had been arrested twice; in both cases the prosecution witnesses had experienced convenient lapses of memory.

Most of the time the police contented themselves with keeping an eye on him so long as he did no harm to the ordinary, uninvolved citizens whom both sides termed "civilians." He paid his men well, occasionally betrayed them, gave generously to the Church and had a fortune of fifty thousand pounds invested in standing timber in Corsica.

He had learned to pick up likely people as he picked up odd facts, salting them away until a use for them emerged later. It was in this role that he had observed the solitary Englishman night after night at the same table. He had noted the signs of a man with too much time and not too much money. He had made thorough inquiries; and now he said: "Max Genovese, called Big Max. Big in the belly"—he slapped himself and roared—"and big in the thinking!"

"Thomas Webb. Big in the feet only, I think."

"I like you," said Max as they shook hands. "You make jokes without laughing—that's good."

"And you laugh without making jokes. That's—what would you say that is?"

"That's—that's Big Max! Tell me, why don't you work, Mr. Webb?"

Webb said nothing.

"Is it because you are so rich? But you don't live like a rich man, or dress or drink like one. And anyway, no man is too rich to work. Look at me."

A thought struck him. He excused himself, glanced at his watch, and whispered something to the waiting Arab, who hurried off.

"I am so sorry," Max apologised. "I have a deal in progress, you know. Just want Chin-Chin to check up on the discussions for me."

"Your secretary?" Webb asked drily.

"My dog. I throw him a bone—he runs for me, barks for me and sometimes bites. But you, Mr. Webb. How long will you stay in Marseilles?"

"Perhaps two weeks, perhaps three. It depends . . . but since you seem to have been checking up on me, you've probably also found out on what it depends?"

The big man laughed again. "Well, maybe something will turn up. I have many interests. Maybe I can put something your way."

"Another bone for another dog?"

"Now you joke again. But I must go. My business discussions, you know."

A car had pulled up by the kerb and by its open door stood the Arab. It was the smallest model of Citroën, the type that looks like a flying deckchair.

"Permit me to walk with you to your limousine," Webb said.

"Ho! My car, yes! I am too rich to need a big car. Discreet, eh? Not so much attention." He poured his great bulk in, the tiny vehicle bouncing and then settling on its springs noticeably nearer the road surface.

Webb bent his head to the window. "I'm a straight businessman, you know. I've never mixed in any sort of . . . er . . . rackets. I'm too old to start now. Policemen frighten me."

Max's laugh shook the car. "Me too, me too. Like the English saying—poor but honest, eh?"

"Poor *and* honest," said Webb.

Max was still laughing as the Citroën buzzed, and bounced off.

It stopped outside a warehouse in a narrow, sloping road towards Notre Dame de la Garde. Max walked briskly up a wooden ramp to a bare space on the first floor. There were no windows; two oil lamps on the floor cast small yellow circles of light and wove long, trembling shadows. Max picked up one of the oil lamps and raised an eyebrow at a burly young man in a reefer jacket who stood waiting for him to speak.

"Over there," said the young man with a jerk of his head.

Max raised the lamp higher, and its light flickered on a figure slumped in a wooden chair. He was unconscious, and if it had not been for the nylon cord lashing him to the chair-back, he would have slipped to the floor. He wore a creased white tropical suit and he had vomited down the front of it.

Big Max stepped towards the chair, took a handful of the occupant's hair, and the head came back like that of a broken puppet. Max stared long at the white face, then he let the head drop, grimaced and said, "For God's sake give me a cigarette to drown this stink. Has he talked?"

"A little, *patron*."

"He was OAS, anyway?"

"Yes."

"And he says, sober, what he said drunk?"

"Yes."

"And—?"

"That's all, *patron*."

The man in the chair had been very, very drunk the night before. He had boasted that he had once been in the OAS —the French terrorist organisation that had collapsed after Algeria became independent. He had boasted that he knew the whereabouts of a large sum of money that had been stolen by the OAS and later hidden. Unfortunately for him, he had done his boasting in one of the Vieux Port bars controlled by Max. Max wanted to know more.

"Chin-Chin!" He called over the Arab and the two men watched him, and waited, while he pondered.

"It's plausible, very plausible," he said to himself at last. "The OAS did some big bank jobs in Algiers while the troubles were on. It was easy—robbing a bank was patriotic then; it was hardly illegal."

He laughed softly at the thought. "Only two days before the troubles ended, a million new francs—more than a million—were lifted by Section 9 of the OAS. They got the money out of Algeria, thought it would finance new 'activity' on the Continent. The fools! Two men hid it. Number Two shot Number One as soon as it was done. Number Two was to report to the OAS treasurer in Geneva. He never got there. Perhaps it had occurred to him what might happen to him after he had reported the location of his little bit of loot! Where is Number Two, huh? A lot of us have wondered for a long time. Well..."

He turned his head to look at the figure in the chair. "First," he said aloud, "we'll find out what section of the OAS our little friend was in."

"*Patron*, he won't talk."

Big Max glanced sorrowfully at the reefer jacket. "For you, no. But for Chin-Chin, the Eiffel tower would talk. Eh, Chin-Chin?"

The Arab smiled a golden smile. "You find out what section he was in, and no more," Max warned him. "More than that, and I'll do to you what you do to him."

Max leaned against a wall, made himself comfortable with a fresh cigarette and prepared to listen to Chin-Chin at work.

THE screams went on and on. They filled the head, behind the eyes and in the ears and at the back of the mouth. They were like a dentist's drill, a broken violin. You could *feel* them, rather than hear them: swallowing you. Every night when he slept, Webb heard them. He knew, in the nightmare, that it was Claire screaming, although the voice was not recognisable as hers. And yet always, when he woke, sweating, he knew that the nightmare was false; that she had not screamed, she would not have screamed; and that was worse.

"*What did she think? God—what did she think?*"

He sat up with a start and realised that he had been shouting aloud. He was shaking. His pyjama jacket was wet; so was his hair. He pressed his forehead with cold fingers, felt for a cigarette and looked at his watch in the brief glare from his lighter. Five minutes to four. An eternity until dawn. Yet how long had *her* night been?

"Here—drink this." His mother-in-law appeared, bulky in a woollen dressing-gown, and offered him a steaming mug.

"Coffee?"

"No, soup. It is always hot—will do you more good."

He sipped slowly and she rocked in a chair facing his bed and said nothing. The window was behind her, and she was almost invisible against the high chair-back. It was like talking to yourself, and getting answers from the night.

"The days I can manage," he said. "It's sleep that's the torment . . . that brings it back."

"Nightmares! They are nothing but imagination. How can they bring anything back? You were not there, you don't know."

"No, I was not there. But I know," he answered slowly.

"My son, do you feel—guilty—about it? Do you think it was your fault? Be honest with me."

"Not really. If I had not gone to work that day, I might have been with her—but I went to work every day. If there had been no OAS, if there had been no Algeria, if things had been different, if people were different . . ."

She leaned forward. "Do not keep her as a nightmare! Think—if a part of her lives on, what would she want for you now, eh? She would want you to remember her with love and joy, to be proud and glad of what you had together; to live on as the full man she loved. And in time to take yourself another wife—not to replace her; even in heaven she would be too much a woman to wish for a rival—but to be a new chapter in your life. That is what she would want."

Her voice rose a little. "In the name of God, do not destroy her by dwelling on the end. When you are lucky enough to have a little happiness, as you had with Claire, you must cling to it, and fight to protect it, and when it is lost—as lost it always is in the end—cling to the memory and fight to go on living . . ."

She struggled to her feet and he realised that a cold light was washing the window. "Dawn," he said. "Another day."

"Don't make symbols," she answered. "It shows me nothing but that the window needs cleaning."

As he dressed, he called through to her: "Do you know a Corsican called Max Genovese?"

"No—Marseilles is full of Corsicans. Why?"

"Nothing. I just met him."

"Well, if he is Corsican he is bad. The good ones stay at home. Only the trash come to Marseilles. Nothing good has come out of that island since Bonaparte!"

★ ★ ★

Three cigarette butts, flat-trodden on a sloping wooden floor. A fourth joined them, glowed a brief round glow in the grey dust, and then was slowly flattened by the thin leather shoe which shod the small fat foot of Max Genovese.

The Arab said: "He was in Section 9, OAS, he says; I think he would not lie, now."

The Arab's hands were in a mess and Max eyed him with disgust. "All right. I'll take over. You get downstairs. If you listen to me, I'll have your ears for a start."

As the Arab left him, Max turned towards the chair. Unaware of the gesture, he straightened his tie, as though on his way to an important appointment. The man in the chair bucked, aware for the first time of Max's presence. His eyes looked up as if from the bottom of a long, narrow and very black well.

Below, the boy in the reefer jacket and the Arab waited...

"All right," said the voice of Big Max, "he's packed up; you can take him away and lose him."

"Lose him, *patron*?"

"Before daylight. That means now."

"But how, where...?"

Patiently: "You're a fisherman, aren't you?"

"Well, I was..."

"Well take him out in your little boat and fish. Don't use the *deux chevaux*. I don't want a mess all over the seats. There's a van at the back."

When they had gone Max mopped the floor, rubbed down the chair and carried it into the office, where he placed it at a table in front of a typewriter. He was about to leave, then turned back on an afterthought. He put a slip of paper in the typewriter and, with two fingers but rapidly, typed: *Mademoiselle, the paint is worn from the legs of your chair. Please do not kick them. Office furniture is valuable and must be treated properly. M. Genovese.*

"Business, business," he was muttering as he walked out.

A few hours later, Max Genovese was sitting back in a barber's chair. Soap was being massaged deferentially into his several chins and Max was thinking.

The business problem which exercised him was a direct result of the information which the former OAS man had given before the breath mercifully ceased to wheeze in his racked lungs the night before.

Max believed that the truth had been spoken as fully as the truth can be known through a haze of drink and pain and misery. There was always the same delicate problem in extracting information, a problem to which Max had given some thought. If you did not inflict the maximum pressure their brains stayed coherent, but they were liable to have sufficient strength to think, and to lie. If you applied the maximum pain until they broke, there was rarely time to learn everything, or to learn it in a sensible, orderly fashion. Although, as a businessman, Max liked his facts full and ordered, his way of business made him choose half a story of truth from a dying man in preference to a pack of lies from someone who still thought he might live. Besides, Max felt this course was more merciful: it was quicker. It was, incidentally, more efficient and made less mess.

And so he sat and was shaved and thought about what he had learned from the dying OAS man and from other sources.

A million francs had certainly been smuggled into Corsica and hidden there. The money had probably been hidden, unknown to the local people, in a village called Christiu. Question: who else, living, knew this apart from Max? Answer: impossible to say. Possibly, nobody. But if the money was still there it didn't matter who else knew, so long as Max was the first to reach it. It had been there a long time, anyway: if it had been taken by any but the most organised gang, word would have leaked out.

The first thing to do was to find out circumstantially, so to speak. If the OAS men had been in Christiu, the local people would still remember: strangers are long unforgotten in parts of Corsica and Christiu was no tourist village. If the OAS had been there, then the chances were that the money was there—and, reflecting on a face from which even terror had departed a few hours earlier, Max was sure that this was so.

By now, Max was feeling almost proprietorial. This was money which virtually belonged to nobody, stolen by terrorists, and hidden in his Corsica—by foreigners. A million, just lying there and doing nobody any good; whereas Max, if he found it, when he found it, would not even have to take it out of the island. His thoughts roamed on fallen leaves in the sweet-whispering forests of tall strong trees which he would buy with a million. A million...

But he did not want to go back himself until he was sure. There were good reasons why Max Genovese's return visits to his native island were infrequent, and discreet. No, he would

have to send somebody—not to look for the money at this stage, but just to find if the OAS had really been in Christiu, and where they had stayed, and walked, and drunk, and what was remembered of them.

But who? It must be a Corsican who could talk and think with the locals in their own language—but it must also be someone who could certainly be prevented from ganging up with them, and learning too much, and double-crossing his master. "A bird with a clipped wing," Max mused. A Corsican, one already bound to him, who knew the island, but who would not dare to squeal to the police or to plot with the locals. Who . . .?

Suddenly Max sat up with such a start that the barber almost fell over in his anxiety not to remove a large and fleshy ear. "Jean-Louis," Max said aloud. "Jean-Louis," and sat back beaming and rubbing his stomach.

Jean-Louis Calvoresi had defected on a vendetta. His elder brother, Marc, had been involved in a feud over a girl and was shot dead by her father. Under the inflexible and bloody rules of vendetta, it was for Jean-Louis to avenge his death by taking the life of the girl's father. His courage failed him and he ran away to France, leaving behind a widowed mother, a brother who was then not ten years old—and a stain of guilt and shame that only blood could erase. Jean-Louis would never be accepted in Corsica; nobody on that island of fierce honour would ever take his side; and there were reasons, too, why he could not go to the police.

Jean-Louis was a coward and a ferret, and far enough on the wrong side of the law to be in no position to argue with his orders. Jean-Louis would do. But, since no man could be trusted too far, certain precautions would have to be taken . . .

FROM his seat on the *terrasse* at his usual café, Webb gazed idly at Big Max and his guest and passed the time by wondering what they might be talking about. The big man's companion was thin and taut and slick—like a razor-blade dipped in brilliantine. His hair was black and greased and tapered into overlong sideburns. His cheekbones were so prominent that he appeared to have shadows in place of cheeks. His clothes were sharp, too: loose Italian shirt, tight Italian trousers.

Webb saw the thin one's movements suddenly stilled; his

lips twitched and his raised voice was heard shrilling: "*Mais non, non, patron! C'est pas possible, ça!*"

Genovese has asked for a bigger cut from the take at some cheap nightclub, Webb surmised to himself. But he was wrong. A fly on the Corsicans' table would have heard the big man saying slowly and easily: "But you are mistaken, little Jean-Louis. It is not only possible, but it will be done. It will be done because if it is not done, you know the alternative. You will take the boat to Ajaccio and you will take the bus to Christiu and you will do as I tell you. You can keep away from your own village, if you like."

"But it is not just my village, *patron*. There are others who know. In Corsica I am . . ."

Max broke in harshly. "In Paris you are a ponce and in Corsica you are a coward, which is worse. But in Paris, in Marseilles, in Corsica or in the stinking fires of hell, you are one of mine; and you know the rules. There is no danger, my little white one, nothing for your sweat. Just a quick business investigation. I will tell you again, because it is right that you should know how I trust you.

"Two OAS were in Christiu after the troubles and hid some papers there, just a list of names of those who contributed to OAS funds. If I get those papers, the pigs named will pay me good money to forget I ever heard of them. So—you go to Christiu, you find out everything about those OAS—where they stayed, where they ate and drank, who they visited, where they might have hidden something they didn't want to be caught with; and then you come back and tell Uncle Max and you get one per cent of what I make—if it works. You can be back in a week. But nobody—nobody, you hear me—must know that you come from Max Genovese . . ."

A shadow fell across Webb's table and he looked up at the bulky figure and asked: "Do you always come when you are not called, hey, Corsican?"

Genovese roared. "It's no good—I like you, English. You're not afraid. Perhaps that is because you don't know me, eh?"

"Perhaps if I knew you I wouldn't drink with you," said Webb, calling the waiter as the Corsican sat.

There was silence as two *pastis* were brought. Then Genovese lit a cigarette, holding the tip between his teeth and saying through the smoke: "Do you have to like a man to earn five thousand francs from him?"

"Not so long as it's legal."

"Legal, legal! Money makes everything legal. Money is power, and power is legal, eh?"

"So I could do with a little money," said Webb. "But I can afford to be fussy."

"This interests me," said Genovese, settling his bulk more comfortably in his too-small chair. "I like philosophy. Look at all those Marseillaises passing by in their cars. I might do business with half of them. Do you think I should inquire into their characters or their politics first? Do you think I should bar those I don't approve of? Half of them, for example, were almost certainly OAS a few years ago. Would you . . ."

Webb's chair fell back with a crash. An uncontrollable shaking seized his hands. He gripped the edge of the table and bent towards the Corsican, seeing him through a mist of rage. "If you think I'd touch OAS filth . . ."

His right arm drew back, about to sweep down across the fat face, but Genovese moved with surprising speed, gripped the wrist and, their two faces close, said intensely: "Quiet, quiet, English. I joke, I philosophise, that is all. Quiet. How should I know the very word enrages you? Quiet . . ."

Webb breathed heavily, willing the murderous trembling to stop. "All right," he said at last. "It's just that I don't like OAS. I'd sooner starve than touch their money."

"That's all right, English. A man is entitled to his hates, and I do not inquire . . . But there is nothing like business to clear the head. May I talk?"

Webb nodded.

"Well, now. I am a good Corsican—I invest my money in the island. Timber, I have, good forest land. But the island is developing for the tourists. Hotels, holiday camps, all round the coast. But on the coast only. In the interior—nothing; nothing but mountains and trees and the *maquis*. Suppose, I think to myself, suppose in some lovely village in the interior Max Genovese built a holiday camp, chalets, tents, caravans, and in the unspoiled island, away from the cheap holidaymakers. Good, eh?"

Webb grunted.

"And legal?"

Webb smiled.

"Well, first I must find the site and I must be sure the local people will co-operate, because they are strange, these Corsicans, and if they are against you, nothing can succeed. So

I send someone to look things out and to report to me. The young man I talk with just now. You saw him, yes? Well, he will go for me. But can I trust him? Trust him not to double-cross me, to tell my plans to a business rival, take money and fly off, never to return to Uncle Max in Marseilles? Who knows? So, to be sure, I send another to watch him, to note all he does and everyone he speaks to, to report back to me also—and to be sure he returns to Marseilles. Are you with me?"

"You don't trust little Sharpie, so you want me to spy on him, is that it?"

"Spy, spy! 'Commercial intelligence,' all businesses do it. I give you two thousand francs—from which you pay your expenses, of course. You go to Corsica for a week, watch little Jean-Louis, and when you *both* return there is another three thousand francs for you. Is that so difficult?"

"Why send two men? If, for some reason, you trust me more than your friend, why not just send me?"

"An Englishman? To talk to Corsicans? The price of land would treble for you for a start! No, you would learn nothing, anyway. This needs a Corsican. And Jean-Louis is a Corsican. It is just that he is likely to be a better Corsican if you are my precaution. Always take precautions in business, my friend!"

"Why should you trust me?"

"Because you have nothing to lose and nothing to gain, except five thousand francs from me. Because I guess that you do not care—about anything, very much, is that not so? Because you know nobody and nobody knows you. Because I take a liking to you—what does it matter? Now, the site I have in mind is a village called Christiu..."

That evening, Genovese reflected with satisfaction that his plans were well laid and his lies well chosen. He had the two hand-picked men for the job. The worst that could happen was that either might learn of the existence of the money. But so what? Max comforted himself. Jean-Louis was too yellow to seize his chance, and would be watched by the Englishman, anyhow. And Webb...OAS money...He was probably the one man in Marseilles who would rather die than touch it.

All in all, Max Genovese was well pleased.

He could not know of the conversation that was at that moment taking place between Jean-Louis and the Arab, Chin-Chin, in a dingy room in the Old Quarter.

"You do not know what it means to me, to go back to Corsica," Jean-Louis was saying. "To go back to the one place in the world where I am worse than nothing, where anyone who knows me will spit upon my shadow."

"It is worse not to do as the *patron* says."

"But for what? All for some bits of paper, for some lists of lousy names."

The Arab smiled incredulously. "Names? Is that what you think the OAS hid? Names? A million francs is what the *patron* seeks in Christiu."

Jean-Louis let his breath out slowly in a whistle. "For a million francs a man might do much."

"For a million francs the *patron* will do much. Watch it, little one."

But Jean-Louis did not hear him. With a million francs, he was thinking, a man might even buy his courage back.

WEBB was not a subtle man. He saw nothing glamorous, or even interesting, in the role of spy, slinking around after a third-rate Corsican; and so, fairly soon after the steamship left on the thirteen-hour voyage to Ajaccio, he sought out Jean-Louis Calvoresi.

He found the Corsican in the third-class bar, drinking alone. Webb produced five poker dice and asked if the other would care to throw for a drink. Two hours later, they were seated at a little table with a raised rim which only sometimes prevented their glasses from sliding to the floor as the ship tilted through the night.

Webb had asked the tourist's questions about Corsica and had been oddly moved by the warmth of sincerity which brought the answers to life as Jean-Louis spoke of the quickening heat of the sun on the *maquis*—the rich growth of shrub and bush which covered much of the island—and its perfume, which you could smell from out at sea; of the coolly-dappled forests, the cascades in the high mountains.

"I thought the *maquis* was the French Resistance, in the war," Webb said, to keep the conversation going.

Jean-Louis affected an alcoholic pretence at being hurt by his ignorance. "They took the name from our *maquis*—a place to find cover," he said, and recited the names like a religious incantation which sounded so much better in French than it would have done in English. "There's juniper and arbutus and myrtle and thyme; box and honeysuckle and

broom; rosemary, verbena, lavender; and little wild strawberries among the fern. That is our *maquis*."

"And what about the bandits? Isn't that where the bandits are supposed to hide out, in the *maquis*?"

Jean-Louis laughed. "Once, yes, but not any more. Just before the war the government sent troops from the mainland to round them up. Ten thousand soldiers it took, for just a few bandits." He added with pride: "We are tough, we Corsicans."

"And still bandits when you get the chance?"

Jean-Louis, the ponce, the coward, his small black eyes brightened by drink in his thin sallow face, was suddenly furious. "In Corsica, you can go anywhere in safety! If you have not bread, any Corsican will feed you. If you thirst, any Corsican will give you drink..."

He matched his gesture to the words and refilled their glasses as he continued: "In your other countries, men have no honour. They even murder women, mothers. No Corsican would kill a woman..."

Then he added an afterthought in disarming candour: "Except his wife, of course. A Corsican might kill his wife. But that is a private matter."

Webb smiled a small smile and pressed his point. "But it must mean something, that so high a proportion of Corsicans have been bandits?"

"They are not bandits as you know them—robbers," Jean-Louis said. "They are—were—*bandits d'honneur*, bandits of honour. It was vendetta, that was the cause of it all. Vendetta is the code of honour, a life for a life, a death for a dishonour. To kill in vendetta was against the law of the government. The man of honour who killed in vendetta took to the *maquis* to hide. He became a bandit of honour. The people saw to it that he had food and clothes. When he needed money, he robbed—but not his own kind."

He was silent again, then burst out passionately: "How can you understand? You, a foreigner? The bandits are no more, but vendetta is not dead. Vendetta goes on so long as a man lives. I could show you, today, a dozen families where the young boys have no fathers, no cousins, no elder brothers, because of vendetta. And when those boys grow up, when they can use a gun or a knife, the vendetta will go on. I told you just now that if you hunger, a Corsican will feed you. That is true; you are a stranger; that is their honour. But if you were a Corsican in vendetta and if you

were lying in the gutter dying of thirst, and the sun dried out the marrow in your bones, your enemy in vendetta would not give you a drop of water to wet your lips."

Webb thought about himself. The rules may be bloody, but it makes it easier if you have them. His wife had been shamed and killed by men whose names he would never know. They were OAS, that was all, and the OAS was finished—his vengeance exacted by others. When there was not even vengeance left, what remained to a man?

They drank much of the night. When the ship docked at Ajaccio at seven in the morning, they blinked their way drunkenly ashore in the unsteady companionship of men who have talked the night through in words which said more to themselves than to each other.

Jean-Louis knew a café on the waterside which let rooms, and they checked in and ordered a steak each and a litre of *ordinaire* instead of the expected coffee-and-*croissants* breakfast.

The sight of the large and slightly greasy plates being carried to their table at this unlikely hour caused some amusement to the three or four blue-dungareed men who stood at the bar drinking coffee on their way to work. Jean-Louis found himself getting jumpy, tense. Every innocent glance from the bar became a threat. Did someone recognise him? *Could* someone recognise him? Is that why they laughed—because they had spotted the coward who had dared to come home? He was too drunk to be rational. Who could be trusted? Nobody. Least of all on this island, where your past lingered. Least of all if you worked for Max Genovese and your nostrils had caught the dangerous sniff of a million francs. Nobody could be trusted.

Not even the man across the table? An Englishman. A foreigner. Out of his depth here. In a funny way, almost the feeling of a friend, after that long night of talking on the ship. But . . . But . . .

Jean-Louis pushed his plate back and rose. "I'm for bed," he said thickly.

Webb muttered that it was a shame to waste good steak, transferred Jean-Louis' leavings to his own plate, and began steadily to chew his way through the second helping. The men at the bar noticed and laughed approvingly. Halfway up the stairs, Jean-Louis heard them and wondered what they were laughing at.

Webb staggered up to bed some time after noon. He awoke ten hours later, a verification of all the old clichés about hangovers and a proving ground for a few new ones. He washed but did not bother to shave. He made his way into the next room to collect Jean-Louis. The door was open, the bed empty. Webb shook his head like a swimmer, and suddenly it was as if his cold-water wash took a delayed effect. He ran down to the café and spoke to the owner—a large and rather ugly man of about fifty. Yes, Jean-Louis had left only a few moments earlier; he had gone on to the quay and turned right.

The café itself was like a frontier post between the two worlds of the waterfront. To the left, the street lamps cast their light on parked cars, and the yachts of the rich bobbed elegantly at anchor. To the right, the street lamps ended and the white and brassy yachts gave way to small fishing boats, sullenly buffeting old motor-tyres. The black roadway was hazardous with small black sheds and baskets and poles and repaired fishing-nets spread almost invisibly over its worn cobbles. Webb found himself stumbling as he hurried over the nets into the darkness and away from the town, and then suddenly a hand was on his arm, a stubbled face was breathing stale wine fumes into his own, and a voice was saying: "Got a cigarette, friend?"

Just then, the headlights of a distantly-turning car flicked through the night and, before they were gone, he saw the figure of Jean-Louis walking steadily away, some twenty yards ahead. Webb called his name, and Jean-Louis glanced back, and hesitated.

"Don't complicate matters, friend," said the winey voice close to Webb's ear. "You can spare a little something without getting nasty. A few francs, maybe?"

Webb tried to pull away, and called Jean-Louis' name again. He was scarcely aware of what the stranger had said: he was only vaguely conscious of a thick accent that was not French.

"Jean-Louis!" he shouted and started to run. The stranger whistled, and in that instant Webb's feet were jerked from under him. He flung out his arms to catch his balance and the net seemed to rise up all about him and his arms were entangled, his head, his legs. He gasped as the coarse, knotted twine bit into his flesh.

Dark figures were around him, free and untrammelled and able to strike him. Their blows fell and he turned on his

feet like a blind man, unable to protect his head or his stomach; and then they seemed to be fighting among themselves and somebody made a sort of gurgling, choking noise and two figures were running off and a third was stumbling between them, and Jean-Louis Calvoresi was panting gusts of yesterday's wine and garlic into his face and cursing: "Pigs! Pigs!"

"Jesus wept! What were you saying last night about crime in Corsica?" Webb gasped, and Jean-Louis, tucking a knife away somewhere under his clothes, put an arm round his shoulders. Webb sucked in great draughts of air and bent double for a moment and the tension ebbed as he found himself laughing senselessly.

Jean-Louis stared at him, then snickered and giggled and then threw back his narrow shoulders and they laughed together, tousled and somewhat bruised, like a pair of idiots alone on the black waterfront.

"They wouldn't be Corsicans, those pigs," Jean-Louis explained when he had recovered his breath. "After your wallet. Probably ex-Foreign Legion—there's a lot of them here since North Africa. Scum, some of them."

He started to untangle Webb from the nets. "But a Corsican saved you, eh? You can rely on a Corsican!"

There was something brittle, something too jaunty about his voice. But Webb simply asked: "Why did you come back to help me? You were running away."

"I was going away because my business is my business. I came back because . . . There, you are free."

The net fell to the ground and Webb stepped clear of it. "Because . . . ?" he prompted.

"Because maybe I felt you were a friend, and a man should not leave his friend. Because it was dark, and I could not see their faces and I was angry and I did not think . . ."

His voice cracked and, with embarrassment, Webb saw that Jean-Louis had lost his flimsy mask of bravado and was half-sobbing. "What does it matter—'because'? I was not a coward, was I? I came, I helped you, didn't I? They ran. A coward would not act so."

"You were one against three," said Webb gently. "You were brave."

"They could not see my face . . . I couldn't have done it for myself. For a stranger, it was easier. I . . . I . . . I can't keep it up . . . I want to be sick. It was nothing, proves nothing."

Webb gripped Jean-Louis' shoulder briefly, then let his hand fall, and in silence they walked back to the café.

They called for wine—a hair of the dog that bit them, Webb joked.

"A hair of the dog, for a dog," Jean-Louis said, and then, placing both his hands on the table-top, added with surprising dignity: "The simple fact is, my friend, that I am a coward."

"To save me against three men?"

"Yes, that. It is because I am a coward that I came back, to try to prove that I am not. If they had not been greater cowards, I would not have lasted. How—tell me this—how does a man cease to be a coward?"

"All men know fear," said Webb, too easily. "A brave man is merely one who lives with his fear, and goes on. A coward is one who accuses himself. Perhaps it takes a brave man to admit that he is a coward."

The café owner interrupted with a roar of laughter, his heavy head shaking on his thick neck. He thrust a hand inside his shirt to scratch his belly, and tufts of black hair showed through. "A coward is a man who is all talk and no action," he said, and spat, and saw Jean-Louis flush. "When a man's a coward, he's called a woman—yet why don't you ever hear a woman called a coward, eh? Answer me that! Ask *her*, perhaps she'll tell us."

He nodded his head towards the end of the bar and Webb turned and, for the first time, saw the girl who sat behind the cash box. She was motionless, looking slightly down and, although the eyes of three men were upon her, she might have been alone on an ice-floe for all the attention she paid. Her hair was black, and rather straight, and very long. Her face was that of a slim woman, the bones fine and boldly shaped under the flesh. Her arms rested on the counter, sun-bleached hairs on sun-tanned skin, and her hands, large and hard, had no wedding ring, which was unusual in Corsica for one of her age: she must have been about twenty-four.

"How many men are all talk and no action, eh, sulky?" the café owner prodded her, his eyes moving like fingers.

She still did not hear or see or even flush, and he leaned towards his two customers and said: "She knows, if she'd like to tell us. Well, she won't get that complaint here. Only been here a week, but she knows, don't you, sulky?"

The girl came from behind her cash box and they saw that she wore the shapeless, high-necked black dress of the

peasant, with a cheap plastic apron over the skirt and, on her brown feet, espadrilles of canvas and rope. She took the bottle from their table in silence and put down a bill. Jean-Louis paid.

"*Service non compris,*" she said—not to Jean-Louis, but to Webb.

Jean-Louis gave her the tip with a flourish and reached out a hand to her buttocks, which were suddenly, smoothly, out of his reach.

The two visitors rose to go up to their beds. "And don't run away in the morning," Webb said to the figure in front of him on the stairs.

"I won't—I owe you the short time when I was not a coward," said Jean-Louis.

They went on up, but Webb was halted by a voice from below, a voice thick and husky with the Corsican accent. "You forgot your cigarettes, *m'sieur.*"

He looked down the narrow tunnel of the stairway into the eyes of the girl and into something inside her; then he was catching the packet of cigarettes she threw up to him and she was gone.

SHE came to him in the night, like an echo seeking its source, like a spirit in search of substance. Webb did not see the door silently open, or hear her espadrilles slide across the bare floor. He felt that someone was with him, and then he smelled her, a compound of sun and scent and sweat and skin and hair. She put her fingers on his lips, so softly, and all she whispered was: "Come with me—but be silent."

He put on his clothes, stretched out an arm to rest his hand on her shoulder and, breathing softly, they made their way down the stairs and across the empty café.

She led him across the quayside to the right, farther into the darkness and farther into the dream, and then she had stopped, and was lowering herself and saying: "Sit," and he sat beside her on a pile of nets against the side of a fisherman's shed.

The absolute darkness was intermittent here as clouds moved on woolly feet across the face of the moon. He turned his head, to speak, but before he could break the dream an arm slid round his neck and her lips were on his, and they were soft and open and moving, and her tongue came between his lips like a firefly. He was lost in the dream, and his hands moved on her back and her arms.

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She caressed the hardness and the softness of his warm chest; and suddenly this was what his wife Claire had done, and the dream was no more.

He pulled himself away. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's not my night." He stumbled to his feet, fumbled in a pocket, and thrust a handful of notes towards her. "I'm sorry—but here, take this."

Looking down at her, he could not see her eyes, but he could feel the intensity of their gaze as she stared up at him through a long silence. Then she rose, took the money and tucked it in her belt.

"Thank you," she said. "It is right that you should pay me, no? After all, it is not the whore's fault if the customer cannot perform. And you pay me because I am a whore, no? I must be a whore, because I am known as a whore, and people become what they are called, do they not?"

Her hand was in her long hair, pushing it back slowly from her forehead. He could not make out her tone: it was proud and cool; and yet false.

"I've never known a whore talk about it so much," he said.

"Ah, but then you have never known a Corsican whore. It is a very special kind. Unique!"

This was flung at him, like a stage flirtation, but now her voice became almost demure. "Is it because I am a whore that this is not your night?" Her voice was sweet and she moved towards him. "Don't worry. See—my hands are at my sides. What can I do?"

As she spoke the last words she moved so close that their bodies were touching. She lowered her head so that all he could see was the faceless blackness of her hair. She leaned slightly forward and began to sway gently like a drowned mermaid in the slow tides at the bottom of the sea.

They stood as one, and he was conscious of the blood in his veins, and the heat and the softness of her and, as one, they sank to the ground again. Neither said a word. He sat with eyes closed as her fingers spoke to the back of his head, to the lobes of his ears, to the line of his jaw. Then some cyst of guilt and fear and despair and shame broke within him and it was as if a warmth was spreading through the inside of his body, spreading and melting him, and flooding him with a life that was something new. He seized her and kissed her hard and long and deeply.

Now there was no barrier left within him. He had forgotten her as a person, an individual identity. She was all and

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only the great need of man and of life, and he could not wait to drown himself and die and live again in her.

But now she was struggling. She was pulling at his wrists, and trying to push him away, and twisting her body.

At first he was furious, and cursed under his breath and tried to force her, and then he was disgusted and pulled back, feeling sick and dirty and ashamed of them both. The words were thick in his throat. "All right, for God's sake let's get back to the café."

Then, as the tension ebbed, it all seemed so very ridiculous. He laughed and said gently, "We don't seem to be able to make our minds up, do we?" He disengaged himself from her arms and said, "Come, we should not spend the night teasing each other. Come back to the café."

"No, no, please, not yet. Let us stay here. We don't have to do anything. Let us just stay here and talk."

He shook his head. "Back to the café, my girl, and let's just pretend it didn't happen. It didn't, anyway."

They walked back, silently, and let themselves in silently, and at the top of the stairs he put out his hand in a gesture of goodnight. Accidentally, it touched her cheek, and her cheek was wet.

Webb thought about it, in his narrow bed, and understood nothing. Just a waitress who was a part-time whore? But why, then, did she draw back? No, this was no practised whore: she was more like a girl giving a good imitation of what she thought a whore would be. Giving an imitation, and then losing her nerve. But in that case, why did she suddenly change again, and beg him to stay with her?

Webb gave it up. What did it matter, anyway? A tease in the night. But on the threshold of his mind, like a taste left on the palate, there was the memory of a look in her eyes and of a damp cheek.

There was something else, and this he did not want to think about. His own body, freed from the chains of his mind, had awakened to her: if she had not turned back, he would have been out of control. This—and Claire lay dead. He did not want to think about it and imagined that he succeeded, but his sleep was restless and his brain toiled and his voice muttered while his body slept.

He was dreaming. There was a man and there was a woman; and the man was asking, the woman refusing. Now the man was demanding, and the woman was still refusing.

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This was where the dream should have ended, as it had ended before. But it went on. The man was threatening, his voice harsh with lust and anger, and the woman's whisper was scornful. There was a thud, and then the voices were muttering rather than whispering, and the reason Webb could not make out any words was not that this was a dream, but because he was hearing a foreign language. Corsican.

The dream was now, and the voices were coming from along the corridor. The girl's voice, and the café owner's. Webb remembered the man's words in the bar a few hours earlier: "Only been here a week, but she knows, don't you, sulky?" And the girl's voice, in that strange tone: "People become what they are called, do they not?"

The scuffling went on and Webb tried not to hear. It was no concern of his: she had teased once too often, that was all, and it was her lookout.

The sound of a slap came to him so clearly that it was as if hand had met flesh in the same room. Before he knew it, he was walking along the corridor. A door was open. There was no light, but his eyes were accustomed to the dark. The café owner, stripped to the waist, was sprawled across the bed. One hand, outstretched, clutched the girl by the wrist as she pressed into the corner, as far from him as she could get.

She wore a nightdress with a high neck and old-fashioned long sleeves; one of them was torn at the shoulder and hung down like a rag. Over the humped body on the bed edging its way towards her and laughing throatily, her eyes met Webb's. She moved her head and opened her mouth as if to speak, but no sound came.

The man on the bed became aware, and turned his head and said thickly to Webb: "She's going to have it, whether she likes it or not."

Suddenly this was how it had been in Webb's recurrent nightmare. This was how it had been. A spasm gripped his neck muscles and he shook for an instant. Then he threw himself at the figure on the bed.

The man seemed all flesh and there was nothing to get hold of. Webb cupped the man's scalp in both hands and pulled back the heavy head by its thick hair. His knee was in the Corsican's back, and the huge neck was straining like a bull's awaiting the knife; and Webb freed his right hand and chopped it down, hard, somewhere between the shoulder and the neck. He hit bone and hurt his hand.

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He chopped again, and all at once the Corsican fought back. He heaved and rolled over, and Webb was under him, and they were flailing in a hot tangle of bedclothes.

Webb was being hurt. Fists like clubs hammered him from he could not see where. His hands were caught up in a sheet. He pulled frantically and it ripped. A weight was on his stomach and blows were thudding into him and then, in despair, he gripped the torn sheet in both hands and stretched the cotton tight between them and forced the rigid band up, up. He found the Corsican's face, his eyes, and forced the strip of sheet hard across the man's eyes, hard and up and rigid and rasping.

Finally the Corsican let out a gasp of pain and moved his position slightly, and in that instant Webb kicked up with his knees and rolled the other to the floor.

Now it all seemed to Webb to be moving like a slow-motion film. He was hitting the Corsican with something, a chair, and he was saying through his teeth, "*Salaud*," over and over again, and the girl was saying something, she was at his side, clutching his arm, trying to stop him. What was she saying? "That's enough." Enough? God, enough!

Webb felt sick. He looked, uncomprehending, at the chair and dropped it. His head hurt, and his hands, and his gut. *Salaud*. He must stop saying that. *Salaud*.

The girl had knelt over the Corsican and now she was saying: "He's not dead. Pigs like that live long."

Webb was as though drunk. Come outside. Let's get away from here. Air. Outside. The room was fœtid in his nose.

The girl wanted to bathe his face. No. Outside. Air.

Well, let me dress, then. Oh, yes. He became aware again of her torn nightdress and somehow the sight sobered him a little. "Yes, dress. But hurry. I'll see you at the foot of the stairs."

She half-smiled, as if his consideration for her ripped modesty was funny in the circumstances. Perhaps it was.

On the dark side of the quay, at the foot of some steep stone steps, they found a low-lying dinghy moored astern of a tied-up fishing boat. They clambered aboard the dinghy and Webb sprawled full-length on his stomach and pushed his head over the stern, his face under the black, slightly warm water. He came up spluttering, then scooped out a handful of water and splashed it on the back of his neck and plunged

his face in again. He shook his head and let the drops run on to his shirt.

He sat facing the girl and wondered what to say. The boat gently bobbed in the tideless night as the water licked and lapped, and the sky seemed to come down all around them. The girl's hand trailed in the water—the white arm looked cut off at the wrist—and she gave a nervous little laugh and said something.

"Please speak French. I don't understand Corsican."

"But you are not French?"

"No, English. But I speak French."

"I—"

"What were you going to say?"

"It was nothing."

After a time he asked: "Are you all right?"

"Yes," she answered. "All right."

"I don't know where to start thinking," he said. "I've only been in Corsica a few hours and I've been drunk with Jean-Louis—lord, he must have slept through that shemozzle, I hope. I've been wrapped in a fishing-net and beaten up modestly by some gents after my wallet..."

"You could have been drunk and beaten up anywhere. It is not right to blame the island. Besides, they could not have been Corsicans: we would not rob you."

He shook his head in wry amusement at this repetition of the island logic, and went on: "I've knocked out the man who runs the café, and heaven knows what he'll say, or what I'll say to him, when I get back. And you...as for you...I don't know what I've done. Or haven't done."

"No-one made you fight Pierre, him at the café. Why did you?"

He was uncomfortable. "I suppose it dawned on me that perhaps you didn't want...what he wanted...and I don't like rape."

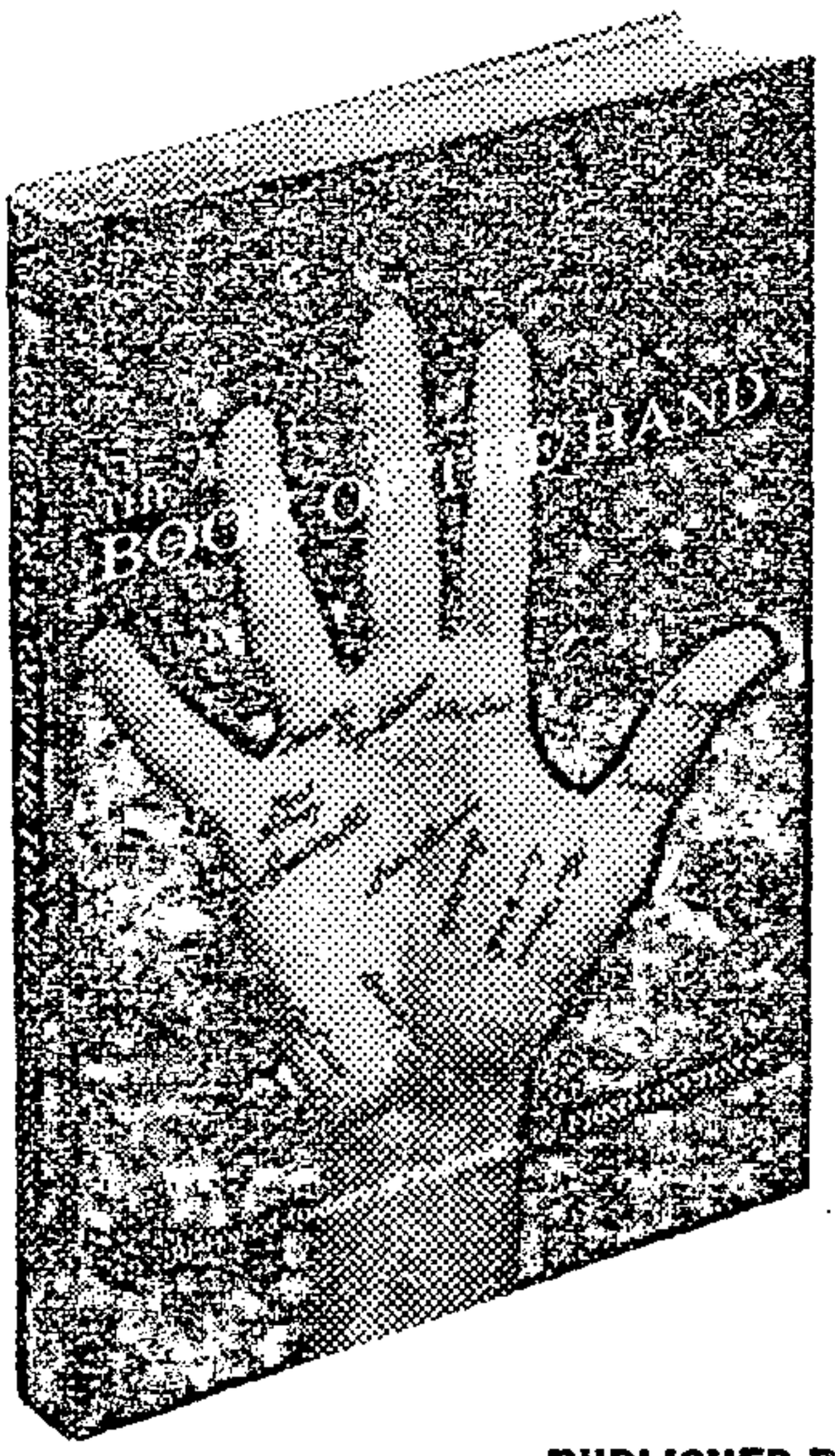
"Strange. I thought all men liked rape."

Her voice had that odd edge again, but he scarcely noticed. "Well, I don't."

"Is that because you are English, or because you are not a man?"

"It is because I once...knew of...a case of rape, and it was not amusing."

"No, it is not amusing." Suddenly she burst out: "How like a man to put it so! 'Not amusing.' Amusing! Have you any idea what it means? Have you?"



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He answered gravely. "I'm sorry. That is the English coming out. When an Englishman is serious, which is not often, he picks the lightest words."

"I do not understand."

"No more do I. But to me it is serious when a woman is attacked and perhaps, when I saw him, and you, I was thinking of another woman and I lost my temper."

"Not of me?"

"Not of you. Not then."

"I suppose you thought I had asked for it?"

He did not reply, and at length she said: "Do you see now why I did not want to go back to the café? Why I tried to make you keep me out here, on the quay, to stay with me?"

"What's your name?" he asked.

"But do you see?"

"What's your name?"

She gave up. "It's Mariane."

"Mariane." He let the syllables linger, tasting them. "Tell me about it, Mariane. All of it."

And so she told the Englishman her story—or as much of it as she then knew.

THERE were no men in my family when I grew up (Mariane said). It was in a village in the mountains, not so far from here, and there were no men. I had two brothers and they were young, but they escaped to the mainland in the war and they did not come back—we heard that they had died, killed somewhere, somehow.

My father stayed at home, because he said there must be a man in the family, but at night he used to go to the top of the hill with a torch and flash it in the dark, and flashes would come back from the sea, from a submarine, I suppose. Sometimes he brought men home with him, strangers, wet from the sea, and they hid in the attic for days on end, and one day they were gone.

This my father did for the war; but the Germans must have seen the flashes; one day they came and took him outside and shot him, against the wash-house wall. They used a machine pistol and he bled a great deal. They made my mother scrub up his blood. She begged them to let her leave it. His blood was his honour, and the mark of it should always be on his house, she said, but they made her scrub it up.

I do not remember this, because my mother still carried me inside her, I was not born until a month later, but my mother told me often that this was what happened.

And so I grew up in a family without men. All I knew was that one day I would bring men back into our home. I would marry, and my mother would have a kind of son, and I would bear sons, and she would have grandchildren, and we would be a family.

These things my mother told me so often, and I was always looking for the man who would be my husband. Even before I was a woman I dreamed of him, and after I was a woman they were the same dreams, because my mother did not tell me how men were, and what is a wife, and no-one told me.

All the men who came to the café, I stared at their faces and I was amusing to them, and tried to make them smile, to see if I could recognise the smile of the man who would be my husband. I suppose you would say I was flirting with them, except that it was innocent, I was so innocent; and, of course, it was safe, because these were all Corsican men of my village, and they understood, and they would not touch me, an unmarried girl.

One day there were strange men in the café, visitors, from the south of the island. They were there for business, looking at land, at timber. They, too, I tried to make smile, to like me, and they laughed and said I was pretty, and I was so pleased and excited, because the boys of the village had never called me pretty.

They were staying for two nights at the café and on the second day, in the afternoon when it was siesta time, one of them asked me to show him the way up a certain mountain where there were many trees which he said it was his business to value. It was hot, but we were laughing all the way up, the man made many jokes, and near the top, among the tall trees, where there is a cascade, a little waterfall, so cool, we paused and the man took off his shirt and splashed water on his chest.

I put my face under the water and came out laughing, the drops running into my mouth and my eyes so that he looked all fuzzy, and he told me to get cool properly, to take off my dress. I did not think I understood what he said at first, so I just laughed, and he said it again: "Take off your dress."

I did not know much, but I knew that this was wrong, although I thought, perhaps he is from the south, perhaps the

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customs are different there, he does not understand. I thought he was so nice, so funny, you see.

He asked me if I ever went swimming, and I said yes, I had been swimming sometimes, and he said that on the beach girls wear bathing costumes in front of men, so surely I should not be ashamed to take off my dress. After all, he said, I would still have more clothes on than the girls on the beach.

Then he put out his hand, and I thought he was going to touch my face and I was all excited, but instead he put his hand in the neck of my dress and pulled, hard, and the buttons came off and he tore it.

No man had seen my breast before, and suddenly he had hold of me and I was afraid.

The funny thing is that I didn't scream. In all those long minutes, if it was only minutes, I did not scream. I fought and struggled with him while he forced me on to the ground and at one time my head was under the cascade and I thought I would drown.

Perhaps I should have drowned. It would have been easier and hurt less.

No, don't stop me. You wanted me to tell everything and I will. He tried to hold me down but I bit him. I bit his face, his cheek, hard, and pulled myself away from him. Once I was on my feet, on a mountain I knew, he could not catch me.

I ran down the track as fast as I could. All I knew was that I wanted to be with my mother and comforted by her. My mind had not even taken in what had happened.

One or two people were in the street, and they noticed, and followed me, and spoke to others as they went, and by the time I reached my mother's house there were six or seven there behind me, a little crowd.

My mother looked at me and looked at my dress, and I waited for her to open her arms so that I could throw myself into them.

But her face was hard, so hard as she stared at me, like a stranger, worse than a stranger, and she said: "You have been with a man. You whore."

The people behind me were muttering and, in front of them all, my mother said to me: "Who did you go with?" and I said, "The stranger from the café," and she said: "Did he see your body?"

I was crying, and holding my torn dress together, but in front of them all she said again: "Did he see your body?"

and I said: "Yes," and she looked like stone, like a piece of the mountain.

I tried to tell her more, but all she said was "Dishonour," and the crowd behind me had grown now, and they were all talking at once. Several people called out: "Vendetta," but someone said: "Vendetta is for men," and someone else said: "This is a family of women. There is no-one to honour the vendetta."

My mother said in an awful voice that I would not have known if I had not seen her face: "I pronounce vendetta and I will honour it. In the name of my dead husband, in whose blood I once thrust my hands..."

This probably sounds very strange to you who are not Corsican, but this is how we are, and this is how it was.

I had been back in the village perhaps five minutes, no more, and the man still had not come down from the mountain. My mother went into the house and upstairs to my father's trunk and from it she took the revolver he had kept hidden in the war, and which the Germans had never found.

She came outside again and stood in the sun, unwrapping the heavy revolver from its oily rags and holding it in both hands.

After what seemed a long time, we saw the man coming down the mountain path and turning up the street. He looked very small under the tall eucalyptus trees which stand at the side of the road.

He walked towards us, not realising, not seeing the gun my mother held.

When he was nearer to us he started to say, with a sort of laugh: "Look, there is no need for a public meeting about this. All that happened was..."

Someone in the crowd said to my mother then: "That is an old gun. Is it loaded?"

And she replied: "It has been saved since my husband died. It will shoot."

I suppose the stranger heard that, or perhaps he just then saw the gun for the first time, because a look of bewilderment came on to his face and he turned his eyes from side to side of the small crowd.

My mother stepped forward and said to him: "You have dishonoured my family. I pronounce vendetta. In the name of my dead husband, in the name of my dead sons, I claim your life to avenge this dishonour."

I don't think that, even then, the stranger could believe this

thing, because he gave a nervous laugh again and started to say something. But I do not know what he would have said because before he could speak the first word my mother fired three bullets into his body and he died.

Then people in the crowd said we must tell the police, we must tell the priest, because this man was a stranger and his friends would soon be back in the village, and it was right that the truth of his death should be known.

So the priest came and he took me into the house and, while my mother and the people waited outside, he asked me questions.

At the end the priest said: "Is that all?" and I said "Yes," and he pressed me, and I said I was sure.

He stayed with me until the policeman came, and he told the policeman what I had said. The policeman said—and I remember it clearly, because I was so puzzled: "Well, it wasn't really rape, then, and that makes it awkward. A death for a rape, that is vendetta and fair enough, even with a stranger. But this other . . ."

Then he and the priest talked in low voices and the policeman said what he was going to do, and they both went outside and I followed them.

The policeman said to the people: "This was not a good death. I am Corsican and I know vendetta, but this was not a good death. I have my reasons."

And my mother started to speak, but he silenced her and said: "I knew your husband. He was a true Corsican, and my friend. This I can do for him. Now listen. This stranger was not killed by a woman. He was not murdered and the woman is not guilty of murder."

The people began to murmur, they did not understand, but the policeman walked over to the stranger's body, still lying in the road.

The policeman unbuttoned his holster and drew his gun and fired one bullet into the stranger's dead heart.

Then he turned and put back his gun and said: "This man attacked a girl and I came to arrest him and I was forced to shoot him to prevent his escape. My gun lacks a bullet. A police bullet is in his body. That is all there need be. We need no doctors, no *post mortem*. You are Corsicans. You have no tongues."

The priest said: "Yes, I saw you shoot him and he is dead," and the priest went home.

And after a time the people spoke among themselves and

said: "Ah, well, the stranger is dead, and no doubt the policeman will get promotion some day, and it will save a lot of fuss," and they went home, too.

For a long time my mother would not speak to me except to call me whore. I said that I had done nothing wrong, it was the man, I had struggled; and she said that did not matter, I was dishonoured anyway, I had been known by a man before I was married.

The priest spoke to her often, and that was when I understood what the man had tried to do and had failed to do before I got away, when I understood that I had not actually been raped.

But it was no use: my mother knew only that his hands and eyes had had my body, that the whole village thought I had been raped, that no man could want me now."

In the end I cried out: "But the man is dead. Surely that ends the dishonour?"

But she said: "Even that pride is taken from me. The policeman's bullet robs me of honour, the honour your father would have claimed."

In the end, the priest said that I should leave the village and start a new life: I had forfeited my family and my village. My mother brought me to the capital, to a café she knew, and told the owner's wife that I had been dishonoured by a man, and paid her to take me on as a waitress. The woman must have told her husband. He came to me in the night and said: "Come on, you do it, I know you do it," and I cried out, and his wife found us, and called me that word again and kicked me out.

And so it has gone on. It is as though I am marked. I work in cafés because that is all I can do. But always the men seem to know. Perhaps because they are told; perhaps they can just sense it. Always, they know that I know; always they try.

But I shall never lie with a man. I know when they are drunk, the pigs, and how to tease them, and how to leave them with nothing. That is my story. That is all of it. It is not much, and you won't understand. You are a man.

AFTER the girl had finished her story, they sat in silence for a long time in the gently rocking boat. Webb saw the despair on her face, and he wanted to help her, and he tried to talk her back into life.

Suddenly, as he talked, he was no longer wondering about the events of the night before. It was not that he had answered the questions: the questions themselves no longer mattered, or existed. "Come," he said abruptly. "It's getting light."

She stared at him, puzzled. "Come? Where?"

"Mariane." He took her hand; it was cold and limp. "You have nowhere to go. You come with me. That's all."

"But where to? How long?"

He stopped. He had not thought that far ahead; he did not want to.

"I am going inland for a few days, with a...a business associate."

"And then?"

Her words brought him up against the thought that he did not wish to acknowledge—the thought of *What then?*...of the risk of commitment, responsibility. The thought that if you allowed yourself to become involved with another human being you acknowledged the future and forged links with it; and betrayed links with the past...

He had not thought ahead since his wife's death; was he ready to, now?

Not too far ahead. Not more than a few days.

She was saying: "You don't have to do anything, you know. I am used to it. It has all happened before."

"Shut up," he said. "Come."

They clambered out of the dinghy and up the steps. As they crossed the dawn-lit quay he let her hand fall and pretended not to see that she was softly crying.

At the café, nobody was yet awake.

They collected their possessions and then went to wake Jean-Louis.

The Corsican was sleeping in his Italian shirt and a tiny pair of scarlet underpants. As he lay on top of the bedclothes, his long, thin legs, grey-white like an old man's, made him look oddly vulnerable. He was muttering in his sleep. When the pressure of Webb's hand on his shoulder roused him, his eyes opened in a stare of blank fear. They blinked into puzzlement; then, as they focused on Webb and the girl behind him, they brightened into a sort of life and he said cockily: "I wondered if you'd get her."

Webb told him to stop being funny and get dressed. They

were going to hire a car and they were going to drive to Christiu.

"Christiu?" Jean-Louis asked. "What's all this about 'us going to Christiu?"

"Why not?" said Webb. "That's where you're going—you told me on the boat."

"I did? Maybe. So?" Suspicion sharpened the small eyes. "So what makes you think you come too?"

"I've nothing better to do. And also," said Webb, lowering his voice and jerking his head towards Mariane, "also, there's the girl. I've persuaded her to . . . er . . . come along with me for a while. I don't know anywhere on the island yet . . ."

Jean-Louis relaxed. He gave a dirty laugh. "Why didn't you say? We're friends. We get drunk together, I save your life, eh? You want me to show you a nice quiet spot where you can take a girl for a few days. Okay. Why not?" He slapped Webb's shoulder. "Bút you will pay for the car, huh?"

As they went down the stairs, Webb asked Mariane to calculate what their bill should be. He intended to leave the money on the counter, but down in the bar he found the café owner emerging from some back room. His face was badly bruised and he had the sullen look of a man balanced between anger and fear.

Webb supplied the appropriate moral push. He slapped some notes on the counter. "That's to pay for our two rooms," he said. Slap. "And that's for the girl's room—in case you don't know, she quit last night." Slap. "That's for damage to a sheet. And if I ever see or hear of you again, if I get one sniff of your stinking existence, I'll stuff you with your own guts."

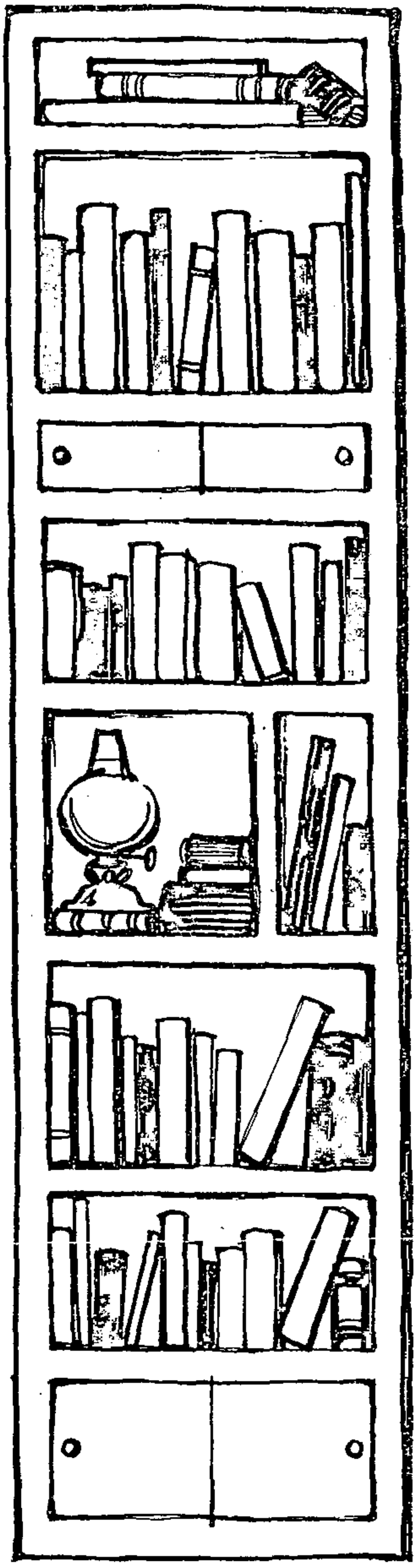
As the three walked out, Jean-Louis said admiringly: "You swear well in French."

"It's a good language to get angry in," Webb answered. "Now let's find a car."

© Lawrence Hammond 1966

Next month: Webb finds himself caught between Jean-Louis' desperate fight for survival, and Max's ruthless cunning

This Argosy serial is condensed from the novel "A Life to Lose," which W. H. Allen are to publish in early March.



book reviews

THE guest of honour at this year's World Science Fiction convention was a still youngish man who, just over ten years ago, was selling books in a shop in Oxford.

The man is Brian Aldiss, and the new Science Fiction selection of his work, *Best SF Stories of Brian Aldiss,* has been edited and the stories selected by the author himself.

Perhaps one of the easiest to read is also the most frightening—"Poor Little Warrior." It's a horrific affair about the dangers and history of big-game hunting.

This story is helped a little by touches of irony, as when the hunter peers through some scanty cover at his colossal quarry (a browsing brontosaurus) and then hesitates to shoot, for his conscience and sense of fair play are shouting, Here's a sitting duck!

My own personal choice is a story called "Old Hundreth."

This is SF at its imaginative best; a strange alien world that waits sometime in the future for us, peopled with fantastic inhabitants.

Brian Aldiss is always travelling in search of fresh backgrounds and this probably is the secret of his ability to get freshness into each story.

When not travelling, he gets down to writing in an old cottage in the Oxfordshire countryside which he shares with a small but very independent black cat. (Faber and Faber, 21s.)

A Suspension of Mercy by Patricia Highsmith has a dark and sinister dustjacket which gives warning of what is to come.

It is a story of a not-very-successful crime writer called Sidney Bartleby.

When his wife feels the need of a change (she is as bored with their marriage as he is), she goes off on her own, which gives him the chance to try out his latest plot.

Of course this involves his pretending to kill her and disposing of the body in a very cunning way.

Not surprisingly, this odd behaviour backfires, and when his wife fails to reappear the police start to become unpleasantly interested, because they have been tipped off by the nosey old lady next door.

Patricia Highsmith is a young American who lives quietly in England because she finds the United States "dull." A graduate of Columbia University, her first big success came with the publication of "Strangers On A Train," which was later filmed by Hitchcock.

Her next novel is to be set in Italy, home of the Borgias, which should give her plenty of scope for the uncomfortable sort of nastiness she handles so well. (Heinemann, 21s.)

Fred Speakman's *A Forest By Night* is the diary of a year spent by the author when he was trying to recover from a tragedy that seemed to empty his life.

During this year, he lived alone in a forest with only the badger, deer, fox and a brown owl to keep him company.

He describes beautifully the strange sights and happenings of the forest—some happy, some sad—but a world that very few town-dwellers ever discover. (Bell, 18s. 6d.)

Ernest J. Gaines is an American who has written moving short stories about Negro communities in the deep South.

His novel, *Catherine Carmier*, is about a sensitive and intelligent woman who could have had a much wider life if it had not been for her very strange relationship with her father.

Into Catherine's life comes Jackson Guerin, a young Cajun. They had known each other as children.

Catherine and Jackson naturally fall in love and the drama starts affecting everyone in their lives.

The characters, although complex, are convincing. But the real story lies in the differing attitudes towards the plight of the Negro. (Secker & Warburg, 25s.)

The Elders by Rachel Trickett is a sensitive and compelling novel about modern academic life. It is also topical in that the quinquennial election for the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford takes place this month.

In the novel, the obvious candidate for election to the Chair of Poetry at Oxford is a middle-aged poet, Martin Kendrick. He is well-known and respected, and the election looks like a sure thing. That is, until Desmond Collier, another poet, arrives and disrupts the quiet orderly scene. (Constable, 25s.)

Desmond Varaday's knowledge of the African bush is exceptional. His book, *Gara-Yaka's Domain* proves this. Gara-Yaka is the name of his cheetah and the author writes of his experiences while moving around the game reserve in order to study the cheetah at close quarters. But he also witnessed many remarkable scenes, such as an elephant fighting with a crocodile; two buffaloes outwitting a pride of young lions and a pack of baboons combining to drive off a leopard. (Collins, 25s.)

Princes In The Making by Morris Marples carries the subtitle, " A study in Royal education," which suggests a dull and heavy treatise.

But in fact this " history " turns out to be not only absorbing, but amusing.

The author, himself a schoolmaster, writes of men and women who taught and guided the young lives of our monarchy from the days of that formidable father, Henry VIII, to those earnest parents, Victoria and Albert.

What a difference the mentors chosen for them made to the lonely, often grim and unhappy lives of these royal children.

There was little Lady Jane Grey, unloved and used ruthlessly by her scheming parents, who was married and beheaded

when she was only a girl of sixteen. Then there was young James who was separated from his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, when he was still a baby. And when Edward VII became King, he admitted that his schooldays were certainly the unhappiest time of his life. (Faber & Faber, 28s.)

Boy Gravely by Iris Dornfield is a book you must read for you will have never come across anything like it before.

Boy Gravely is born in a slum to a mother who is a very lovely and contented slut. Almost before he can walk, he listens to sounds.

He has a genius for music but the sort of genius which is poised on the edge of madness.

Only his rapacious grandmother recognises this extra-ordinary talent which she intends to exploit for money and she helps by teaching him how to steal the musical instruments he needs.

As soon as he is old enough, Boy escapes from the squalor of his family and, after listening spellbound to his first real orchestral performance, accepts his life's dream and obsession to write music. But he wants to write a completely new kind of symphony—with strange and wonderful effects.

How Boy achieves this, starting from scratch—and the extra-ordinary people he meets on his way, makes this a moving and funny, but warmly exciting book. (Hamish Hamilton, 18s.)

Robert Wilder's *Fruit Of The Poppy* is about this lovely scarlet flower that grows rampantly in the Mexican sun. It's the source of wealth to men without conscience, who sell its fruit—opium—to the addicts who will buy it at any cost.

A relentless war is waged between these sellers, or " pushers," of the illegal drug, and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics have agents who spend their days in constant danger trying to prevent the smuggling of this deadly drug into the United States.

Half documentary and half melodrama, *Fruit Of The Poppy* has been made a Book Society Choice. (W. H. Allen, 25s.)

Strip Jack Naked by Alexander Baron is about a forty-five-year-old gambler who goes to Paris to escape not only nonetary claims but also emotional ones.

In Paris he meets Jenny Landor, an American college girl of twenty-three, and they travel to Venice together.

Their relationship is never very satisfactory and ends in tragedy. (Collins, 18s.)

Diary Of A Mad Old Man is one of the few novels about old age. This one has more than a ring of truth, for it is the last work of a great Japanese writer, Junichiro Tanizaki, who died last year at the age of seventy-nine.

The story concerns a man of seventy-seven. He is very rich and pampered, but his " madness " lies in the gradual restriction of his interests.

Day after day his mind dwells on three topics—his bad health, the manner and whereabouts of his burial, and his daughter-in-law.

The old man is fascinated by the girl—a beautiful, gaudy ex-chorus girl who has become very Westernised.

It is soon evident to the old man that she is being unfaithful to his son. Accepting and utilising this fact, he secretly begins squandering money on her.

He acquires the privilege of attending her in the afternoon and becomes more and more bewitched.

Apart from the story, the novel is interesting because one gets intriguing glimpses of a Japan where the traditional and contemporary are strangely mixed. (Secker & Warburg, 21s.)

Rex Stout has been writing novels about Nero Wolfe and Archie since 1934. His latest, *The Doorbell Rang*, is the best of all.

A very rich woman comes to Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin, claiming she is being harrassed by the FBI. She claims that agents are following her and her family, that her telephone has been tapped and her privacy invaded.

Wolfe, with some hesitation, takes the case and quickly becomes involved with murder and the FBI agents.

The book, beautifully plotted, is a new challenge to the wits of Nero Wolfe enthusiasts. (Collins, 16s.)

The 1966 *Almanack of Sport*, edited by Charles Harvey, is the reference book for anyone interested in any sport. It not only looks back on the records, honours and highlights of great events and personalities of the past, but for the first time gives facts and figures for the coming year of sport.

Part One is devoted to the Calendar of sport for 1966. Part Two is a dictionary of sportsmen and their achievements. And the last part is an encyclopædia of sport which includes records, results, the origin and history of every sport and a directory of famous clubs. (Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 35s.)

Susan Cooper is a thirty-year-old English woman, married to an American scientist and living in the United States. Her first novel, "Mandrake" was hailed by British critics as one of the best in the prophetic novel field.

Her new book, *Behind the Golden Curtain*, presents an arresting view of the United States as a country cut off from the influences and understanding of the outside world. Affluence and confidence hide emotional and physical violence symbolised by the assassination of President Kennedy. As a result, according to Susan Cooper, the Americans lose themselves in sport and religion and anti-intellectual attitudes. Whether she is right or wrong, America is documented in a highly personal and vivid way. (Hodder & Stoughton, 30s.)

NEW PAPERBACKS

Penguin have just brought out another outstanding book in the Science Fiction field—J. G. Ballard's splendid hair-raiser, *The Four Dimensional Nightmare*. (3s. 6d.)

The Vampire, which consists of many of the best vampire stories in the world, is presented by Roger Vadim. This collection can't miss, with stories by authors of such calibre as Lawrence Durrell, Edgar Allan Poe, Guy de Maupassant and Ray Bradbury. (Pan, 5s.)

Where The Spies Are, by James Leasor, was originally called "Passport To Oblivion." The story is about a quiet country doctor, contentedly minding his own business, who suddenly finds himself involved in a fantastic mission among spies who stop at nothing. Strangled women, dangerous women, beautiful women, plus a journey that takes the doctor far from peace and home, make this great excitement to read. (Pan, 3s. 6d.)

Some of the stories for *Late At Night*, presented by Alfred Hitchcock, are spine-chillers that might be better reading in broad daylight. However, there is one by Evelyn Waugh which is good reading at any time and also a novel, "The Iron Gates," by Margaret Millar in the collection. (Pan, 3s. 6d.)

Spinsters In Jeopardy and *Singing In The Shrouds* are the two latest Ngaio Marsh murders to be published in paperback. The first starts off at a great pace with suave Roderick Alleyn of Scotland Yard and his artist wife, Troy, travelling on the Continental Night Express. Their train slows up for a minute,

just long enough for them to become impotent witnesses of a murder seen through the lighted window of a house.

The second concerns a sex-killer who sprinkles his girl victims with flowers and sings while he murders. When, on a cold winter night, a ship sails from the Port of London, it is known that the bizarre murderer is on board—which is why Alleyn joins the ship on one of his most puzzling assignments. (Fontana, 3s. 6d. each.)

Constantine Fitz Gibbon's *Going To The River* is a story of political and economic patterns of a Europe struggling to recover from the ravages of one war, and, despite all endeavours, succumbing twenty-five years later to another. The years between are seen through the eyes of Daisy and Bella, two art students who share a Chelsea flat. (Pan, 5s.)

The Neon Jungle by John D. Macdonald is about a section of an American town under a drifting threat of violence. As soon as the hot weather began, the police knew that something would erupt—and it does, with one of the most explosive of murder scenes. (Pan, 3s. 6d.) **Jan Dehane**

SIX-GUINEA SPECIAL

One of the hidden treasures of Europe is the city of Leningrad. Home of three million people, capital of the Czars (under the names of St. Petersburg and, later, Petrograd), cradle of Lenin's revolution, and today second city of Russia: it is one of the architectural gems of the world and a storehouse of artistic riches. And it is unknown to all but a handful of people in the West.

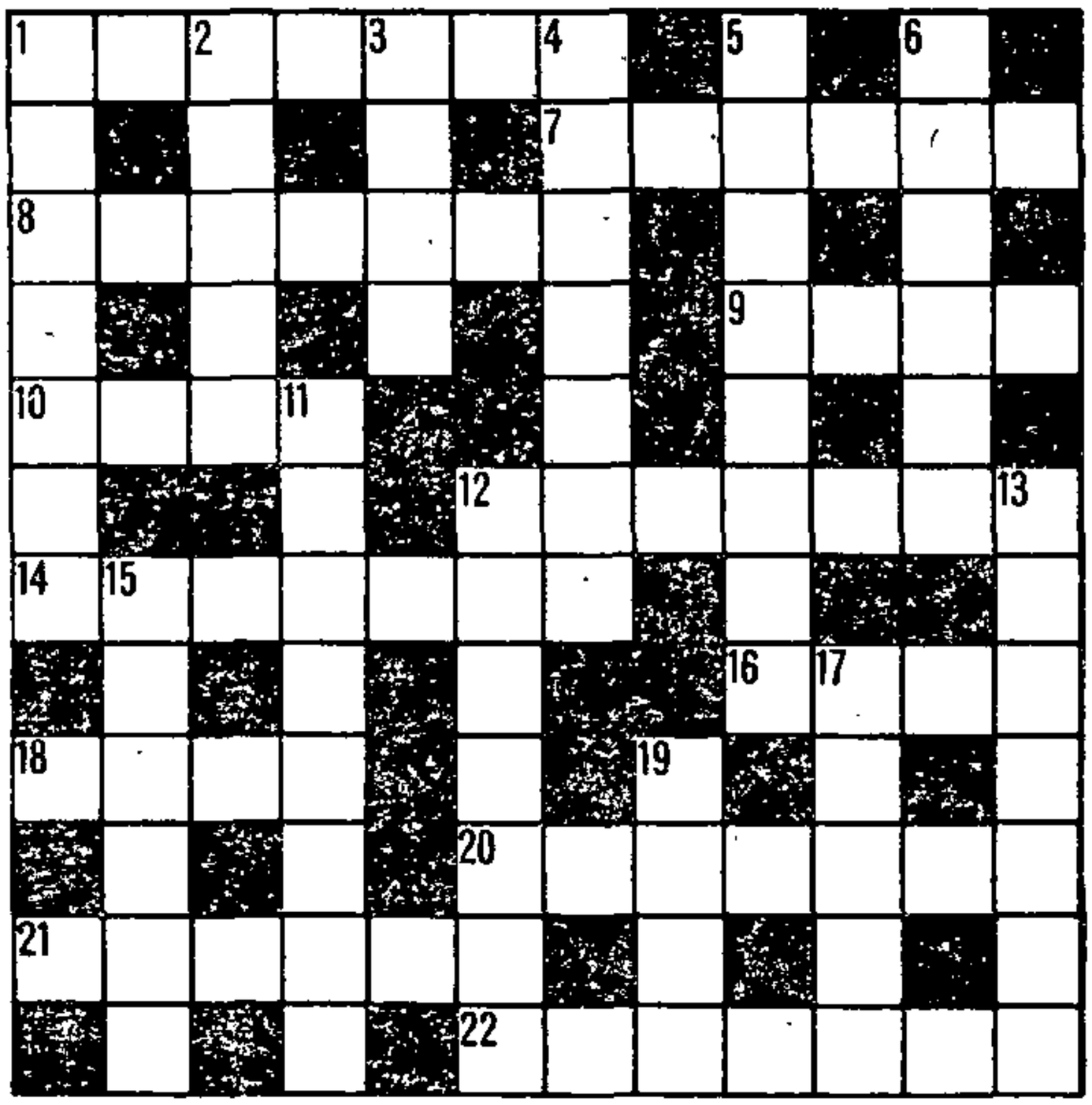
Two hundred and sixty years ago, there was nothing where Leningrad now stands except marshes where bears and wolves prowled through the mists. In 1703, Peter the Great commanded that a city should arise there as Russia's "window on the West." Architects and craftsmen from all over Europe came to the bleak banks of the River Neva and built palaces and churches to rival in splendour anything in the West; they decorated them with loving care and filled them with paintings and statuary on a breathtaking scale.

Many of these buildings were shattered in the last war. For two and a half years Leningrad was besieged; 750,000 of her people died; but the city held out, and afterwards the painstaking task began of reconstructing Peter the Great's buildings in their original glory. Today, that task is almost completed;

and now a book has been published which remarkably captures the Leningrad of the past, as well as the present. *Leningrad*, by Nigel Gosling (Studio Vista, 6 gns.), gives a better picture of the city than anything one could buy in Russia. Mr. Gosling's well-researched text is a model of concise informativeness—although I think he misses the sardonic contrasts between the everyday life of a Communist State and its lush architectural background. But he opens windows in the mind, and nearly 250 photographs enchant the eye. This is an expensive book—but an adornment to British publishing.

L.H.

TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Dog that fawns? (7).
7 Hardy book? (6).
8 Aperture (7).
9 Share in common (4).
10 Smooth in speech (4).
12 Enlarge (anag.) (7).
14 Just retribution (7).
16 French coins (4).
18 Church recess (4).
20 He could get out of anything! (7).
21 Where stars are screened (6).
22 Old sailor? (7).

DOWN

1 Short-range weapon (7).
2 Some excuse (5).
3 Like that old stork? (4).
4 Killed by Hamlet (7).
5 Informative scraps! (8).
6 Chinese temple (6).
11 Guide-book (8).
12 Cotton—for brolly? (7).
13 More vigorous (7).
15 French wit? (6).
17 Often pickled! (5).
19 Sound cattily pleased (4).

(Solution below)

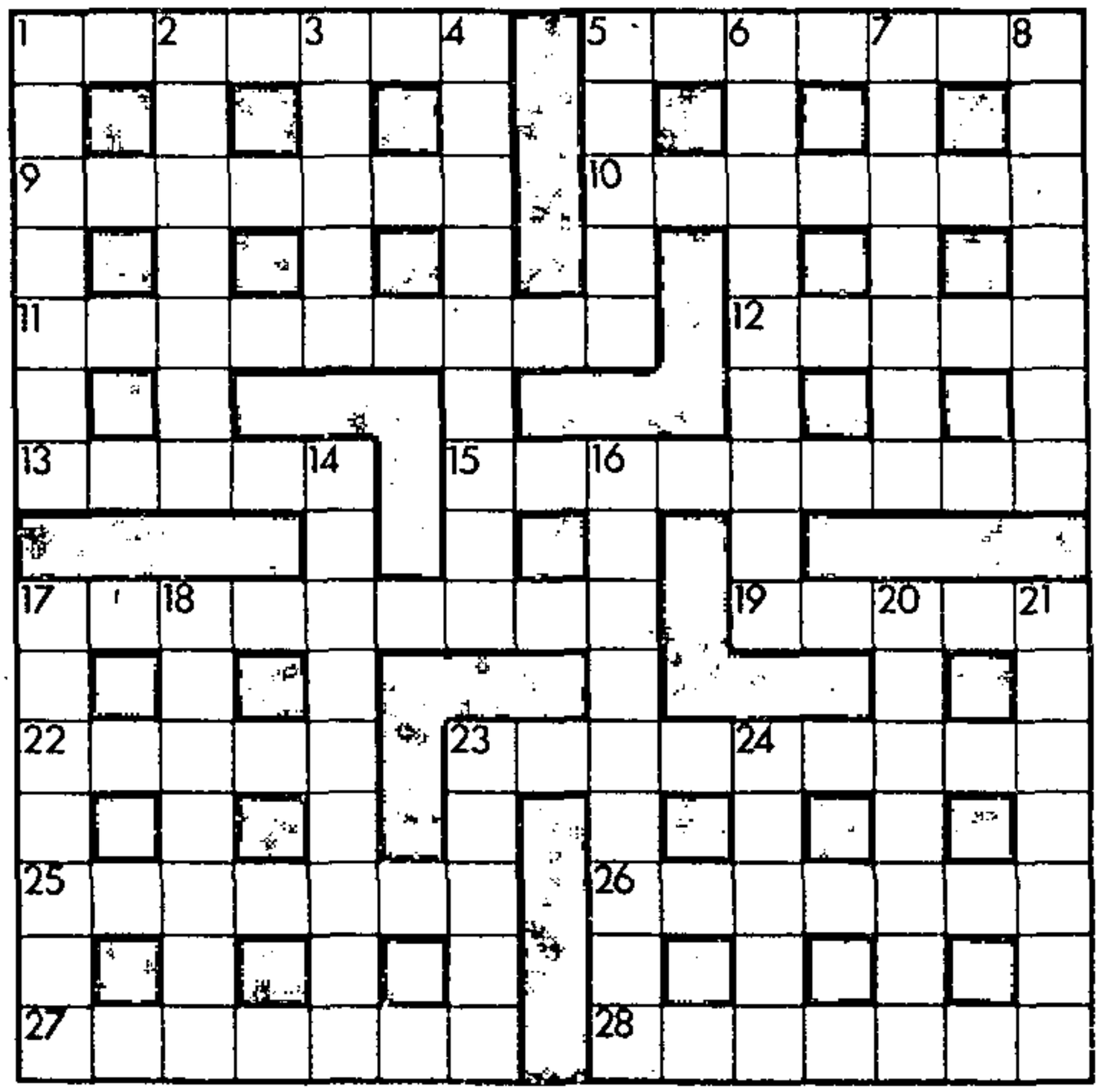
SOLUTION TO TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD

ACROSS. 1, Spaniel. 7, Annual. 8, Orifice. 9, Pool. 10, Glib. 12, General. 14, Nemesis. 16, Sous. 18, Apse. 20, Houdini. 21, Cinema. 22, Mariner.

DOWN. 1, Shotgun. 2, Alibi. 3, Ibis. 4, Laertes. 5, Snippets. 6, Pagoda. 11, Baedeker. 12, Gingham. 13, Lustier. 15, Esprit. 17, Onion. 19, Purr.

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 These strokes flash from the batsman! (7).

5 Snob in topper? (4-3).

9 It's sort of peculiar! (7).

10 Butcher's long knife (7).

11 Halve a can—prepare for fall of snow (9).

12 Worn in synagogue? Hoped it might be (5).

13 "On one side lay the ——" (Tennyson) (5).

15 The petal you turn over influences another's mind (9).

17 Bad aim means defeat (9).

19 Thick, and 12 its root (5).

22 Practice of Hindus ageless? (5).

23 A cross on church—carpet (9).

25 Make it clear (7).

26 Gain a little—how charming! (7).

27 Set lies about improperly dressed? (7).

28 Round, a building (7).

DOWN

1 Altered postage—police came (7).

2 Mean to assert one's years! (7).

3 Egg-shell—eaten off! (5).

4 Essentially a man of deeds and actions? (9).

5 End of rope missing—in the bows? (5).

6 Patient on trial drug is such a pet! (6-3).

7 Fighting over, it's buried (7).

8 When sea duty is changed (7).

14 In cathedral—enter a Dom (5, 4).

16 Its blades cut blades! (9).

17 Not whine? That's rich! (7).

18 A pattern, for instance (7).

20 "Suckled in a creed ——" (Wordsworth) (7).

21 Is a mere bird (7).

23 One of a unit's missing—relatively important (5).

24 Music for nine, tonight (5).

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